Marxism Today

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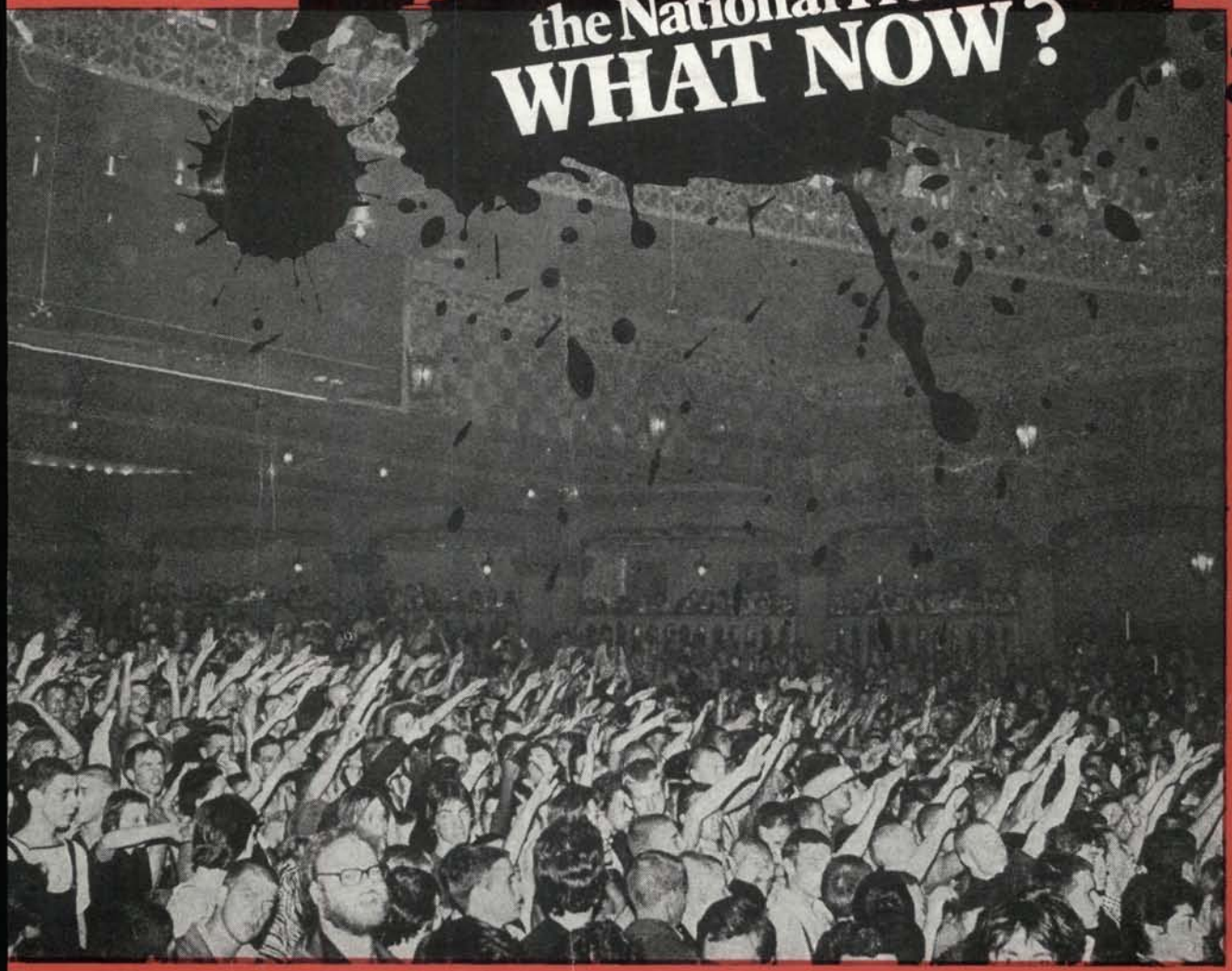
the National Front WHAT NOW?



also inside:

HOBSBAWM, The Forward March of Labour Halted - a response

'Beyond the Fragments' - a review by Caroline Rowan

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Marxism Today

Theoretical and Discussion Journal of the Communist Party

Volume 23, Number 9

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Editorial Comments

STRAUSS AND THE GERMAN ELECTIONS

Like the presidential elections in the USA, those for the West German Bundestag and the Federal Chancellorship which will take place in the autumn 1980, are now the centre of political interest and activity.

Because of the role West Germany plays in European and world economic, political and military affairs, the outcome is of the greatest importance not only for the German people but for the whole world.

The two major parties—the Social-Democratic Party (SPD) and the Christian-Democratic Union, along with its Bavarian counterpart, the Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU which although separate parties act as one in the Bundestag) have as their candidates for Chancellor, Helmut Schmidt, the present incumbent and the arch-reactionary Franz Josef Strauss respectively.

Schmidt is on the extreme Right of the SPD and this has been reflected in the policies pursued by SPD dominated coalition governments since 1969, and particularly since he became Chancellor.

Strauss has been in West German politics for over 30 years and came up through the CSU, the most aggressively reactionary political force in Western Germany. He has been a Cabinet Minister in a number of CDU Governments and became notorious over various scandals connected with his name, after he became Defence Minister in 1955.

He was forced to resign after the weekly *Der Speigel*, exposed some of these, and added criticism of the conduct of some NATO staff exercises.

But he was far from finished politically. On the contrary, his coarse, populist style and consistently ultra-reactionary stance on all questions endeared him enormously to all the dyed-in-the-wool forces for whom even the CDU was not reactionary enough. It was on a wave of such support that he was elected Prime Minister of the Bavarian Provincial Government.

By a cleverly prepared *coup-de-main* he succeeded in pressurising Kohl—the CDU candidate for the Chancellorship already in the ring—to step down, and got himself adopted as the single CDU/CSU candidate.

His nomination has caused divisions in the CDU. Its Bundestag fraction endorsed it by only 135 votes to 102, that is, with something rather less than overwhelming enthusiasm. Sections of big capital must also be apprehensive that Strauss as Chancellor would be far less able to moderate trade union demands and struggles and maintain the "social partnership" which they proclaim exists. On the contrary, they know that his election would be bound to intensify confrontation, polarisation and social upheaval.

The CDU had little choice. It had no-one with the charisma and popularity of Strauss. More important, his nomination reflects a swing to the right, both in the CDU and among wide circles in Germany. Many "top people" must feel that a "hard man" is what they need to improve solutions favourable to them in the crisis period looming ahead.

The CSU programme for the elections to the European Parliament outlined by Strauss last April will serve as the basis of his campaign. He said that the CSU would do all in its power to see that the system in Europe would be "a social-market economy". This 'free order' "must be overwhelmingly safeguarded by the vigilance of its authorities"—that is 'Berufsverbote uber Alles' "We will never accept the nonsense about the two German states." The Federal Republic's position in the Europe of the future must be

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that "the unity of the German Nation is not negotiable." Strauss and the CDU/CSU are also for the stationing of the neutron bomb on German territory. They opposed the signing of the Salt 2 agreement, declaring that it would do great damage to European security, and denounced detente as the continuation of Soviet expansion by other means.

They are naturally very much in favour of increased arms expenditure and the building of more nuclear power stations. To this should be added the CSU's recently proclaimed objective of splitting the existing structure of united, industrial trade unions organised overwhelmingly in the Federation of German Trade Unions (DGB) which is politically non-aligned and open to all workers whatever their politics or beliefs. In its place, they are seeking to organise a new trade union centre, in effect—Christian Democrat trade unions. This is to be discussed at a politics/trade union Conference early in 1980, hosted by the CSU.

One might think that such a programme would automatically give Schmidt the victory. But it is not so simple. While there are some important differences between the two contestants—Ostpolitik, the two Germanies, the approach to detente, the trade unions—they also see eye to eye on many questions, anti-Communism above all. They therefore both support the Berufsverbot, the increasing attacks on civil rights and liberties, increased arms expenditure. And both seek to solve the crisis at the expense of the people, though the methods and tone are importantly different.

It is this, not least, which has led to loss of electoral support for the SPD in recent years. At the 1976 Federal elections the SPD vote fell to 42.6 per cent from 45.9 per cent in 1972, while the CDU/CSU vote rose from 44.8 per cent in 1972 to 48.6 per cent in 1976. Since 1976, the SPD has suffered a decline in its votes in the Provincial Government elections, especially in the big industrial centres, while in this year's elections to the European Parliament the SPD received 40.8 per cent of the vote, while the joint vote of the CDU/CSU parties was 49.9 per cent on a 65.9 per cent turn-out of voters.

While what has been said above indicates how close the contest might prove, a victory for Strauss is by no means inevitable. There exist in Germany democratic forces of great potential power. Some important political successes have already been gained: the ending of the CDU Government after 20 years in 1969, the Ost-politik, the broad united movements around the Berufsverbot, and against the building of nuclear power stations. Similarly, we can cite the defeat of the Statute of Limitations, which would have prevented further trials of Nazi war criminals and the growing movement against the increasing wave of Neo-Nazi terrorism in which the trade unions are playing a big part.

The possibilities of defeating Strauss are therefore very real. But it will require a major and broad movement to achieve it.

THE TUC

As we go to press the TUC is preparing for an annual Congress markedly different in character from the gathering in Brighton last year. In 1978 debate at Congress was dominated by the autumn election that Mr. Callaghan never called. This year the debate, and the resolutions, will have focused sharply on how to repel the Tory assault, from management of the economy to public services, picketing and other trade union rights.

Although the mood at the TUC will undoubtedly have been aggressive, the reality is that the TUC is on the defensive. Congress launched the Campaign for Economic and Social Advance. An examination of its main strands shows a reluctance on the part of the General Council to move beyond the limited horizons set under the Labour government. Public services are defended, but without reference to the damage done by the major cuts imposed at the behest of the IMF in 1976 or to the system of cash limits introduced by the Labour government. Full trade union participation in economic and industrial decision-making is called for. But this is within the framework of the previous kind of tripartitism. In other words, the government, by taking a unilateral approach to economic and industrial policy, has forced the TUC to champion the tripartite approach enshrined by the National Economic Development Council, which facilitates trade union participation in decision making, but ensures that the views of employers, backed up by government, prevail. In this context, it is worth noting that the tripartite system was originally the creation of a Conservative government—the Macmillan administration—in 1962. While the response of right-wing Labour in 1975 to the challenge of the Benn strategy to intervene directly with companies in order to influence their decisions on key

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issues such as investment, was to bolster the tripartite framework for formulating industrial strategy. The General Council then, partly hamstrung by attitudes adopted under the previous government, is defending the previous status quo.

But the crucial weakness of the Congress will have been failure to give any clear lead on action against the government. When all the sabre-rattling has ended, the General Council is still haunted by the impact of last winter's strikes on sections of the electorate, particularly in the south. They are wary of being pushed into precipitate action by a government, confident that it can enlist the degree of public support in an early confrontation with the trade unions that gave it a resounding victory at the polls in May.

The TUC's fears are not without foundation. The final week before the parliamentary recess saw a welter of statements radically shifting government policy towards publicly owned industry, and assistance for private industry, as Ministers tumbled over each other to get to their feet. The publication of the consultative document on industrial relations legislation was accelerated to allow a bill to be introduced in this parliamentary session, rather than the next. The Budget has dealt stinging blows to living standards, and contributed to the accelerated dismantling of British manufacturing industry. Congress will have left the movement armed with words. But these will have little impact on the hard-line ideologies currently occupying Whitehall's ministerial suites. Only deeds will force this government to halt its dash towards the utopian society where market forces are sovereign.

The TUC has recognised that, partly hamstrung by previous attitudes, it cannot choose the ground it fights on. It now has to recognise, speedily, that neither can it choose when to fight. One has only to look at the proposals emerging from the government which will put health care out of the reach of the pockets of many people, dismantle council housing, sell our North Sea resources to private, and possibly, overseas interests, to realise the potential catastrophic defeats that lie ahead. Unless the TUC comes forward with a programme of action it will be paving the way to these defeats, beneath the smokescreen of a war of words. One of the key tasks in the period ahead will be to mobilise people in struggle and force the TUC to give the necessary support and solidarity.

Though, as the delegates drifted home from Blackpool, an issue also in their minds will surely have been the fate of the motion tabled by the National Association of Licensed House Managers opposing an extension of pub opening hours.

JAPANESE THEORETICAL SYMPOSIUM

The Japanese Communist Party—compared with the other mass Communist Parties in the advanced capitalist world—remains relatively unknown. Yet Japan is now emerging as one of the most powerful capitalist powers, above all, at this stage, in the economic sphere. While the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) has well over 400,000 members and, in the last general election, polled 11 per cent of the vote.

This is not the place to give a detailed account of either Japan's development or the position and evolution of the JCP. Suffice to say here that Japan represents a unique phenomenon in the modern world: the one country *outside* Europe and the Americas to industrialise successfully and, as a consequence, become an integral part of the inner club of advanced capitalist powers. And its development—over the last century—reveals a complex and again unique interaction between national initiative and independence and the assimilation of western influences. Although a bald assertion, it is probably fair to say that the JCP displays some of the same characteristics—including, for example, in its relationship with Eurocommunism. Indeed, it is a remarkably independent party. It is also relevant to add that, over the last decade or more, it has experienced serious problems in its relations with both the Soviet and Chinese Communist Parties.

In mid-July the JCP organised a theoretical symposium in Tokyo to which they invited representatives from the Italian, French, Spanish, Swedish, British, West German, American, Mexican and Australian Communist Parties—the British delegate being the Editor of this journal, Martin Jacques. The symposium lasted three days and dealt with the situation and perspectives in the advanced capitalist world, a new international economic order and other general problems. Each representative delivered a paper on one or more of the central themes of the symposium followed by questions and detailed responses to those questions. A number of themes emerged during the symposium, notably the growing

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effect of the international capitalist recession on each country, the nature and implications of the energy crisis and the wide-ranging impact of the women's movement. While certain differences—of both situation and approach—emerged, an underlying similarity of experience was the most striking feature. The symposium proved extremely useful, not least because of the unusual degree of interchange and informality that characterised it, features indeed that were commented upon by all representatives. Above all, this was because of the JCP's own approach towards it.

We hope, over the next period, to publish a number of articles on the Japanese situation and the positions of the Japanese party, including possibly papers delivered at the symposium. These, we hope, will help to introduce, in a more detailed way, the positions of the JCP to British readers.

THE FORWARD MARCH OF LABOUR HALTED?

In this issue we are carrying Eric Hobsbawm's response to the discussion on "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" Since last December, we have carried eight discussion contributions and received another five, all of which have merited publication. The discussion has focused—in a very timely way—on central problems facing the left and the labour movement. We are particularly pleased that so many contributors have been labour movement activists: one of the key objectives of the journal is to bring together intellectuals and industrial militants in the discussion of key questions confronting the left.

Although this particular discussion is now closed, the issues it raises, of course, are not. We hope over the next period to publish many more articles on these themes and we do, as always, welcome contributions from our readers.

Finally, although no firm decision has yet been taken, we are considering publishing the Forward March discussion in separate pamphlet form.

NEW FORMAT

We are pleased to say that the next issue of the journal, our October issue, will appear in a new, enlarged format, It will contain more words and a number of new regular features, including book reviews. It will also offer what we hope will be a more attractive and striking appearance. This obviously gives us an important opportunity to present *Marxism Today* to a much wider readership over the next period, and we will be making particular efforts in this direction including a special promotion drive. In this context we would be grateful for any assistance that readers can offer in helping to increase the circulation of the journal—through making it available at local bookshops, introducing it to contacts, taking out subscriptions etc. The price of the new style *Marxism Today* will be 50p which, we hope, will obviate any need for further increases for some time to come.

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The Forward March of Labour Halted?—A Response

Eric Hobsbawm

Since the very lively and serious discussion on "The Forward March of Labour Halted?" was started by an article in *Marxism Today* a year ago, it seems reasonable that the author of the original article should now comment on the debate. I hope this will not be misunderstood as trying to have the last word. The discussion must and will go on. The questions it has raised are too important to be put on the shelf and, since the bitter experience of the last election, it is clearer than ever that the British labour movement has not yet found satisfactory answers to them. Nor is this second intervention intended to exaggerate the significance of the first article. This was originally given early in 1978 as a Marx Memorial Lecture, and it was not intended as a political statement (except insofar as all marxists try to unite theory and practice), but as a historian's survey of what had happened to the British working class over the past century. There would have been no discussion at all, if people in the movement, and above all people with active responsibilities as union officials or shop-stewards, had not recognised that important and urgent questions for our movement emerged from this survey and had not taken them up.

The 1979 Election

What is at issue is not whether "the forward march" of labour has been halted in some respects, but whether this retreat is offset, or more than offset, by other developments in the British labour movement. About the halt there can, unfortunately, be no doubt. Some indications about the falling electoral support for the Labour Party, its declining membership, and the comparative stagnation of trade union membership were given in the original article. They could have been supplemented by data about the declining support of trade unionists for the Labour Party, as indicated by the payment of the political levy. The general election of 1979 has unfortunately confirmed this analysis.

To put the matter briefly, Labour polled fewer votes than at any time since 1931, nor did any significant number of these lost votes go to other candidates of the socialist or communist left. Labour only barely exceeded the Conservatives among the skilled working class voters. Something like a third of *trade-unionists* appear actually to have voted for the Tories. Since 1974 the swing to the Conservatives among trade unionists seems to have been something like 7 per cent, among unskilled workers 6.5 per cent, among skilled workers no less than 11 per cent. Almost 10 per cent of first-time voters swung right, compared to 1974. These disastrous developments are not offset by the good showing of Labour in Scotland, by the immigrant vote, by the resistance of women to the appeal of the Tories (their swing was only 3 per cent compared to 9.5 per cent among the men), and by the interesting fact that the Labour vote actually rose significantly among the smallish professional and managerial group. (These data are taken from public opinion polls, but there is no reason to think that they are not roughly correct.) What makes these results even more disappointing is, that the percentage of voters actually rose a little. People who had not bothered to vote previously went to the polls—and they chose the Tories. In short, there is no comfort to be got from the 1979 election.

Positive Developments

As against these negative trends, several contributors, starting with Ken Gill (MTD December 1978) have drawn attention to positive developments. *First*, and in the most general sense, the British working class "without itself exhibiting the will to power, has established that it cannot be governed in the old way." (Royden Harrison, June 1979). This is clearly a fundamentally new factor in British politics since the war and, insofar as British capitalism is unable—or unable any longer—to meet its demands, in the British economy. *Second*, and more specifically, there is the rising tide of militancy and industrial struggle, which reached a peak in 1970-74, but has continued or resumed at a high level. *Third*, there is the political power of this militancy as demonstrated by the role of the TUC in politics and by the fall of the Heath government in 1974; people on the left are less inclined to cite the difficulties it caused the Labour government in 1978-9. *Fourth*, it is argued that this militancy has led to a shift to the left in the leadership of the trade union movement accompanied by a shift to the left within the Labour Party—even, by the virtual abdication of the old Jenkinsite right wing, within the Parliamentary Labour Party. *Fifth*—the point has once again been made by Royden Harrison—

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there is the emergence of a new and politically more promising Labour left as typified by Benn.

In practice therefore the case for an advance of labour rests essentially on the industrial movement, i.e. in recent years overwhelmingly a wages movement, and this is recognised in the discussion, which has dealt mainly with the character, possibilities and limitations of trade union action. I do not want to discuss the political shifts within the Labour Party and elsewhere on the left in detail. There has been an undoubted and welcome advance here. Most of the old Labour right has indeed been pushed out of the Labour Party or out of politics. Tony Benn's Labour left, unlike its predecessors for a very long time, actually has a policy, including a policy for tackling the economic problems of Britain. It is indeed the only such policy on offer from within a major party, other than Mrs Thatcher's and Sir Keith Joseph's proposal to turn the economic clock back to about 1865. The possibilities of united action by socialist and communists are indeed better than they have been for many years, the chief obstacle being probably the sectarianism of some smaller groups on the unfortunately fragmented left. But at present these welcome developments represent what is happening within a badly defeated Labour Party, whose active membership is dangerously small—perhaps not more than 300,000 people—and not necessarily representative of its mass support; and a Communist Party and other groups on the left which are, to put it mildly, not growing. Moreover, with the recent shift to the right in the leadership of some unions which, as Stan Newens pointed out (July 1979) "may yet produce dramatic setbacks in the higher councils of the TUC and the Labour Party", it is too early to start counting chickens. It is certainly wrong to overlook the prospects of a future advance, but they are in an asyet uncertain future.

Power of Trade Union Movement

On the other hand the trade union movement is powerful, effective and in recent years highly militant, and evidently changing and developing fast. Nor can it be denied that it has a powerful rank-and-file base. Indeed, the shift of the unions' centre of gravity from official structure to plant and shopfloor is characteristic of the past twenty years—and until recently it has accelerated. The contrast between the weakness of the political side of the movement and the power and dynamism of the industrial side has been striking. It is natural that the left has been tempted to overrate the possibilities and underrate the limits of purely industrial action. There has been precious little else to cheer about.

Its achievements, particularly in the years 1969-74, have indeed been striking, and contributors to the discussion have been right to criticise me for not saying enough about them. It is probably true, as Steve Jeffreys of the SWP has argued, that it has ensured the survival of the strong traditional kind of working-class consciousness (limited though this was and is) in spite of the decline of the old nineteenth century industries which provided its main base and the numerical decline of the old (male) skilled worker who played such a crucial role in it; and in spite of the great improvement in standards of living which middle class observers in the 1950s expected to lead to "bourgeoisification". It has made it possible to integrate the rapidly growing non-manual and white-collar workers into the labour movement and thereby to some extent into the working class. Though something like 40 per cent of unionists are today white-collar workers this has not led to a lowering of militancy. Today it is not only the traditional manual worker who practises union solidarity and refuses to cross picket lines. It has made it easier to integrate the enormously increased number of (often part-time) working women into the organised labour movement. And it made possible the victories of 1969-74.

The Limits of this Consciousness

And yet the limits of this renovated "trade union consciousness" have not been overcome. They have even been emphasised by the concurrent decline in the *political* class movement. It has been argued that trade union action has not been divorced from politics, because it has also conducted non-economist struggles (such as that over pay beds in hospitals) and because left-wing unions and activists take political stands. This is true to some extent, though the overwhelming majority of political strikes in recent years have actually been on economic issues, i.e. directly or indirectly against government attempts to limit free bargaining and to cut down union rights. It has also been argued that they are political in the sense that they will in some unspecified way regenerate the political movement, broaden mass support for a socialist policy and unify the working people of the country. There is not so far much evidence for this.

It is not enough to say that "in our time the Wages Question is being transformed under our eyes from a *Sectional* into a *Class* question; from an *Industrial* one into a *Political* one" (Royden Harrison). This has long been so; capitalists and governments have acted on this assumption. But there is an enormous difference between periods when the Wages Question in this form is part of a wider political upsurge of the working class, as between 1918 and the General Strike (the Labour vote rose from about two to about eight millions between 1918 and 1929), and periods like the present, when this is not the case. In short, trade unionism alone is not enough, as marxists have argued, ever since

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Karl Marx himself, against syndicalists and others of their kind. And the present phase of militancy is overwhelmingly trade unionist and economistic, mainly on the issue of wages. There is no real disagreement about this. What is unclear is "the type of relation which exists between wages and the political struggle" (Pete Carter, January 1979), and how the wages struggle is to be integrated into the wider struggle of which it is only one part. I believe that this is the crucial problem which faces the labour movement today.

For of course—as Roger Murray (March 1979) rightly reminds us—"the wages struggle will go on, regardless . . . I think the denunciation of wages struggles as economistic . . . while being accurate in some ways, is unhelpful". This needs to be said. It would be a curious kind of labour movement which paid no attention to what working people are actually fighting for—to what in crisis and inflation they are almost bound to fight for. But of course there is no danger of that. The danger lies rather in rationalising militant economism into a general strategy.

Sectionalism

Its limitations have been brought out in the discussion, not least by some of those active on the industrial front. There is sectionalism. "The wages struggle in *isolation* and conducted *sectionally* can and does divide the labour movement, isolate it from other sections and assist the rightwing drift" (Roger Murray). Whether sectionalism is stronger in the trade union movement today than in the past, as I suggested (Sept 1978), is a historical question on which I may well have been wrong. It is not worth discussing here. The fact remains that sectionalism—of a different kind from the past perhaps—exists *today*, and that (in Royden Harrison's words) "under the conditions of State and Monopoly capitalism the consequences of sectionalism are likely to become more disagreeable and more divisive." We all know this, not least the comrades active in industry.

There is also the tendency of "straight" trade unionism to take the capitalist system as given and to concentrate on getting the best terms within it. This has always been the weakness of the British trade union movement, "an opposition which never becomes the government" as R. H. Tawney pointed out long ago, and of the characteristic "trade-unionist" form of British working class consciousness which has prevented it from "exhibiting the will to power" (Royden Harrison). It can easily lead to integrating itself into capitalism. At least one major strike of 1978 has been described in the discussion as "an exercise of the market forces within the framework of capitalism" (Mike Le Cornu, April 1979). There are great dangers here. The call for the abolition on all restraints on free wage-bargaining may at times be a crucial slogan, but we might remember that the call for the abolition of restraints on the free operations of the market (of which it is a special form) usually has very different political implications.

Trade Union Action and Political Consciousness

There is, thirdly, the fact that trade union action—even militant action—can be quite divorced from political consciousness. The dockers who struck in solidarity with their imprisoned comrades in 1972 were the same men who had protested against Heath's sacking of Enoch Powell and who jeered Bernadette Devlin outside Pentonville Jail. The fact that over a third of trade unionists voted Tory in 1979, many of them no doubt participants in industrial action, is a sad reminder of this. All the more when we remember that there was a time when trade union membership or background and voting for Labour used to go together.

We may therefore conclude that trade union power and militancy alone important though they are, have not offset, and *by themselves* cannot offset, the setbacks of the labour movement in other respects.

Next Stage of the Debate

But what can be done about it? This must clearly be the subject of the next stage of the debate. The discussion so far has brought forward a number of general suggestions and some more specific proposals, mainly about how to link the industrial struggle with wider demands and struggles, but I don't think anyone believes that satisfactory answers have been found. They cannot be found by wishing the British working class and its movement different from what it has historically been and become. They cannot be found by concentrating on its most advanced sections—whether the active members of the Labour and Communist parties or other parties and groups. The test of vanguards lies in their ability to lead armies. They cannot be found by concentrating on one aspect of the fight of labour—the industrial struggle, which has naturally formed a large part of the discussion—even if this is at present the nearest thing to a mass mobilisation of the working people. There are, after all, today something like 350,000 shop stewards. They cannot be found by adding up various sections of the population who, for one reason or another, may find the left supporting their sectional demands.

Forward Again

A class party of labour (with all its limitations) became the mass party of the British working class (or, since we are a multinational state, the British working classes) by giving unity to the class con-

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sciousness of this class as a whole, and offering, in addition to the defence of material or other special interests, confidence, self-respect and hope of a different and better society. How did this come about? Why did millions of workers and others after 1918 and again during and after the second world war, turn to Labour? Why have, even today, certain groups—the Scots, women, a modest but growing section of the middle classes—in varying degrees resisted the turn towards Toryism? These questions have not been adequately analysed and studied by the left. Perhaps such study may help our movement to find its way forward again. The discussion in *Marxism Today* and elsewhere is welcome because it recognises a serious crisis in the development of the movement. But there is no reason to believe that the faltering of Labour as a political mass movement is historically inevitable or cannot be reversed.

The National Front: What Happens to it Now?

Christopher T. Husbands

(The author is a Lecturer in Sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science and has published numerous articles on the contemporary far right.)

The deep roots of much of the leadership of the National Front (NF) in the more virulent historical wing of British fascism represented by Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League are by now well known.[1] Moreover, the basic commitment of the NF leadership to the traditional forms of fascist doctrine, grounded in anti-semitism rather than only anti-black sentiment, has achieved increasingly wide recognition, especially since the publication of Billig's analysis of Front ideological stances.[2] Tyndall's recent contact with American Nazis is to be seen as only the latest indication of whom the NF regards as its true ideological partners. However, since the electoral decline of the Front became apparent there has been a perceptible move away from examining the mass support of the movement and the precise reasons—as opposed to general and poorly specified attributions of racism—that lie behind this support. The Front's performance in the General Election of May 3, 1979 offers a convenient take-off point for a more exact consideration from a materialist perspective of the causes of NF sympathy.

The 1979 Election

The general story of the NF's electoral reverses in the election has been well publicised in all the anti-fascist media, but some of the details of its decline are additionally interesting and revealing. In 303 constituencies fought, of which 297 were in England, the NF received a total of 1.3 per cent of votes cast. There was moreover a decline in the absolute percentage of the vote in every one of the 80 constituencies fought in both October 1974 and May 1979. Some of these losses were quite dramatic, particularly those in an area of former strength in the transplanted East End along London's Lea Valley. In Tottenham and Wood Green, for example, both in the London Borough of Haringey, there were respective absolute declines from 8.3 to 2.9 per cent and from 8.0 to 2.8 per cent. In Leyton and Walthamstow, in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, there were smaller but still remarkable absolute declines of 2.5 and 2.3 per cent. Outside London, other former relative strongholds experienced similar losses: in the three Leicester constituencies (East, South, and West) NF support fell from 6.4 to 2.7, from 4.1 to 1.8, and from 5.1 to 2.7 per cent respectively, and similar if slightly less precipitous declines can also be seen in former strongholds in the West Midlands. Within London, what NF strength there is has retreated into parts of the old East End in Hackney and Tower Hamlets (particularly Shoreditch and Bethnal Green) and into the southern part of the old London Docklands area (largely Bermondsey, Deptford, and Peckham). Outside London, the only constituencies where NF performances merit any special comment are the 3.6 per cent in Blaby (Leicestershire), the 2.4 per cent in Hertfordshire East, and the 2.2 per cent in Blackpool North, all strongly Conservative in orientation. Both the first two are spatially adjacent to better-known NF strongholds—Leicester and Enfield respectively—and NF support in these two

[1] See M. Walker, *The National Front*, Fontana, 1977, pp. 15-50.

[2] M. Billig, *Fascists*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, pp. 124-90.

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constituencies has been a spill-over effect of organisational and material dynamics similar to those that have operated in the nearby areas. Blackpool North, despite an insignificant black proportion in its population, is apparently one of those exceptional places where the NF has managed to garner and retain support of an extreme right-wing Monday-Club type. In most other places the NF's past attempts, going back to the early 1970s, to gather this type of support have been ineffective or only temporarily successful.

The Major Issues

The electoral failure of the NF, a reality that the party itself has been forced publicly to concede in the post-election issue of *Spearhead* by rationalising the outcome in terms of experience and publicity gained, raises three major issues for the anti-fascist Left.

I. The nature of the NF's mass electoral support, in particular:

(a) what have been the dynamics of NF support at the polls?

(b) to what factors is the NF's electoral decline to be attributed?

(c) could the factors that produced its high levels of support in certain locations in the past again assume their earlier significance and bring about a resurgence of support for the party, even after such a devastating electoral failure in the General Election?

(d) will the factors that have contributed to the party's electoral losses continue to be effective against any potential future recovery?

II The effects of the NF on the major parties, particularly the Conservative party—this means asking:

(a) what are the implications of the NF's decline for the political system as a whole, especially the Conservative government's likely policies on race- and immigration-related issues?

(b) to what extent has the existence of the Front and the success that it was able to achieve among some of the electorate contributed to the present definition of Thatcherism, even if Margaret Thatcher may well have been pushed into this particular aspect of her political position by a pragmatism enforced by circumstances beyond her control?

The answer to these two questions lies directly in two further related matters:

(i) who were the recipients of the former NF vote and, in places where NF candidates were present for the first time, what happened to the putative support that their earlier successes elsewhere would have predicted for them in these formerly untried areas?

(ii) why did this former and potential NF support favour the option that it did in the 1979 General Election?

III. The future of the National Front, in particular:

(a) what will become of the NF in organisational terms?

(b) to what extent and in precisely which respects is it likely to follow the path of certain extreme right-wing continental movements (such as the German National Democratic Party) that have lost or failed to find favour at the polls?

Even if the party's level of popular support were never to be the same again, the NF itself is unlikely spontaneously to disappear.

The Factors behind NF Voting

For the purpose of maintaining appropriate political responses to the NF, it is essential for Marxists to have a theoretical understanding of what have been the precise material dynamics of its mass support. They are otherwise likely to fall victim to the theoretical imprecisions of those non-Marxist excoriators of the NF who seem to regard the phenomenon merely as some kind of product of the dark side of the human soul or who, alternatively and equally imprecisely, attribute it to some ill-defined "legacy of our imperial past". To be sure, the latter factor may well have some value in explaining certain more generalised types of racist expression but it is not sufficient to account for the specific racism of NF support. In order to make this latter argument more pointedly, it is necessary only to observe that the large to overwhelming majorities of the British public who agree (often very strongly) with the imprecise but frequently asked polling question that "too many immigrants have been let into the country"[3] and with similar statements provide empirical support for a concept of "consensus racism"; yet no more than a small fraction of those agreeing with such statements or with even more extreme ones could be regarded as NF sympathisers, let alone voters.

In order to appreciate what produces NF support it is important to recognise that the party's vote varies in two distinct ways. Firstly, it varies geographically and its marked concentration only in certain urban areas is a fact that must be able to be accommodated by any theory seeking to account for it. Secondly, it varies over time—it has increased and decreased in response to particular events. Additionally, of course, there have been interactions between these two dimensions of geography and time, where NF support has grown or declined in differential degree in separate places.

[3] For example, D. Butler and D. Stokes, *Political Change in Britain*, 2nd ed., Macmillan, 1974, p. 303.

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An Urban Phenomenon

Particularly in the approach to the first of these dimensions of analysis, it is theoretically valuable to apply a materialist perspective. Past and recent NF support has shown clearly discernible patterns that have persisted in part to the 1979 General Election. First of all, vote-support for the NF, and at one time also that for the National Party, has been a heavily urban phenomenon. A close inspection of the distribution of NF voting strength—the cities where it is concentrated and its distribution within such cities—permits one to infer some material and other factors behind this support. When we suggest that material factors do operate in producing NF sympathy, we also necessarily argue that processes of long-term economic decline in local communities are felt as such by the people who are affected by them and that among some such people these feelings carry over into the scapegoat-seeking voting behaviour of which much NF support consists.

Well known by now are the areas of particular NF strength in certain medium-sized cities with declining traditional industries (such as Preston and Blackburn in Lancashire, Bradford in West Yorkshire, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton in the Black Country, and Leicester in the East Midlands) and in some inner-city areas of some of the large conurbations like Birmingham. Black immigrants settled in many of these areas in the 1950s and 1960s as replacement labour in poorly paid, declining industries that, despite their long-term decline, were in the short term failing to recruit sufficient local white labour; textiles manufacture is a classic example to cite in this respect. Their one-time white labour pool was migrating to more prosperous parts of the country (or to the white Commonwealth) or, where possible, preferred better-paid local employment opportunities. In the circumstances of today these alternative opportunities for many indigenous whites are far fewer and, as younger whites in particular in these areas come on to their local labour market, they have sometimes been competing, at least until recently, with a more entrenched black group for an ever-falling number of traditional jobs. This entrenchment may have developed in the last ten to fifteen years in industries like textiles through the one-time preference held by some employers for black labour rather than any of the locally available unskilled white labour; this preference was often based on the greater reliability of the former type of labour, its readiness to accept lower wages, and its greater willingness to perform shiftwork.[4] The steps taken by some towns such as Rochdale to make good the job loss in their traditional industry by encouraging the expansion of local tertiary-sector employment have not always provided suitable opportunities for those most affected by this loss. The majority of recruits into such an expanded tertiary sector have been relatively unskilled female employees.

Less well known but perhaps no less significant from a materialist viewpoint has been the sometimes relatively good NF showing in some "growth areas" of the 1950s and 1960s that have subsequently been forced by contemporary economic circumstances to retrench (for example, Luton, Slough, and even some of the New Towns such as Basildon and Crawley). This retrenchment has obliged white workers there to consider types of employment that they could afford to pass up during the period of expansion. Now they, or their successors in the next generation, find themselves competing with a black labour force in these once despised jobs, as the "job ceiling"[5] between white and black labour markets is forced lower by the economic recession.

Patterns of Unemployment

These observations presuppose certain patterns of unemployment among black and white workers; such patterns do not in fact display a uniform across-the-board differential in favour of one or the other group. The 1971 Census showed for the country as a whole a somewhat higher unemployment rate for economically active blacks, though the difference was not great, and black workers have suffered greater relative increases in unemployment since the onset of the present recession.[6] However, the pattern of unemployment differentials varies substantially by the location and age of the appropriate workforce and by its ethnic composition; young West Indians in cities like London and Birmingham are known to be particularly badly hit by unemployment. Yet in some places one may find situations where the unemployment rate among certain groups of black workers (say, middle-aged Asians) is lower than among other local groups (say, younger whites), a situation that has persisted into the current recession. In a very precise sense then—and it is vital to emphasise this if there is to be no misconstruction or misunderstanding—the white racists' refrain that "they are taking our jobs" may have validity in some local situations, if by

[4] See B. G. Cohen and P. J. Janner, "The Employment of Immigrants: A Case Study within the Wool Industry", *Race* (1968), pp. 41-56, and M. McGrath, "The Economic Position of Immigrants in Batley", *New Community* (1976), pp. 239-49.

[5] This notion of a "job ceiling" is found in St. Clair Drake and H. Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945, pp. 219-32.

[6] See D. J. Smith, *Racial Disadvantage in Britain*, Penguin, 1977, pp. 67-72, and Department of Employment, *The Role of Immigrants in the Labour Market*, 1977, pp. 27-8.

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"our jobs" is meant "the jobs that some of us might otherwise have".

Thus, in its attempt to convey the message that black people have in no way, either personally or collectively, been responsible for levels of unemployment, the popular anti-racist observation that there was no black population here during the unemployment of the 1930s Depression fails to make the more vital point that capitalist interest has always benefited from divisions within the working class. This is true both historically in the context of Irish migrant labour as described by Marx and Engels[7] and also contemporarily in the context of migrant labour in Western Europe,[8] even if such a situation was fostered in the first place by parts of the capital-holding class from economic motives of capital reproduction and accumulation rather than from political or social-control ones based on the principle of *divide et impera*.

However, there has also been a type of NF support very different from the materially based type found in certain of the declining-industrial and the one-time expanding-industrial areas, all of which have shown a solid or at least predominant political orientation to the Labour Party (although marked by high abstention rates and reverses over the last few years). Since its Monday Club flirtation of the early 1970s, the NF has been able to build some occasional support on the extreme conservatism of several seaside towns and retirement areas; such places typically display monolithic local Conservative control and virtually no black population. In May 1976, for example, conspicuous successes were obtained in Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Districts on the north Lancashire littoral and at Thanet in Kent. It is interesting to note, however, that much of this type of support evaporated quite dramatically in the local elections of a year later in 1977, far more so than the simultaneous decline of NF support in the more industrial context, and one suspects that this former type of support—lacking as it does the specifically material basis of industrial-urban NF sympathy—is much more temporary, and therefore correspondingly likely to desert when a subsequent political situation defines even local elections as inter-major-party contests. The level of support for the NF in the May 1979 General Election in the Blackpool North constituency is one of the few obvious residues of this type of NF vote.

The Significance of Territoriality

Some of the major alternative attempts to explain NF support—which in part compete with the importance that I have ascribed to certain material factors—revolve in various ways around the concept of what I shall call territoriality, and it is important also to consider their possible significance. What, however, is encompassed by such a general concept? The essence of all types of territorial explanation of NF voting is that they derive in some way from physical proximity of whites to blacks. Most explanations subsumed by the concept of territoriality are non-economic in their operation, although others have an economic component. Hypotheses about NF sympathy being a consequence of the cultural threats perceived by indigenous whites as deriving from unwanted contact with black people—about such matters as language differences, unusual religious practices, unwonted culinary habits, displays of unaccustomed merchandise in local shops, or a supposed decline in the character and neighbourliness of a local community—are based on non-economic territorial processes. On the other hand, arguments that NF propensity follows from the falsely grounded view that property values in an area decline when black people move in from an adjacent neighbourhood or else from competition for the same housing between spatially proximate whites and blacks in an area whose racial composition is undergoing change are examples of economically based territorial processes. If any kind of territorially related NF voting occurs in a particular urban situation it would of course be significantly more common among whites who live close to blacks than among those further away.

The variation throughout a city as a whole in the ward-level percentages of NF support in local elections can be used as a very provisional indicator of the significance of territoriality for NF sympathy. In fact there is remarkably little territorial concentration in NF voting within those cities where the party has been relatively strong[9] and it can be stated

[7] For example, K. Marx, Letter to S. Meyer and A. Vogt, April 9, 1870, *Marx-Engels Selected Correspondence*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1956, pp. 286-7.

[8] S. Castles and G. Kosack, *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 116-79.

[9] The case of NF support in the East End of London, where it has always shown significant territoriality, is exceptional and requires an additional consideration to explain it. Work by G. S. Jones and others has documented the historic dominance of casualism in certain parts of the metropolitan economy that have a distinctive and longstanding spatial concentration. In these places (such as Shoreditch and Bethnal Green), characterised historically by smallscale marginal manufacturing, there is an imperfectly proletarianised, economistic working-class culture which is particularly conducive to the scapegoating of new and ethnically distinctive arrivals who are perceived as economic threats. This theme is further developed in C. T. Husbands, "The 'threat' hypothesis and racist voting in England and the United States", in R. Miles and A. Phizacklea (Eds.), *Racism and Political Action in Britain*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, pp. 174-6.

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as a fairly general principle that the territorial component in the causes of NF voting has usually been surprisingly absent, despite the beliefs held by numerous commentators and by NF leaders themselves about the significance of such factors.[10] Territoriality is probably less a dynamic of NF voting than in the comparable case of George Wallace voting in urban America in 1968.[11]

Thus, it can be asserted that processes at the city-wide level rather than ones at the more local neighbourhood level are of particular importance in understanding the underlying factors behind NF support. Such city-level processes are embedded in the operation of the labour market or perhaps in the "market" (as perceived by some whites) for such benefits as welfare payments, or even in those parts of the housing market where demand is not noticeably concentrated in particular spatial locations.

1976: a peak

However, one can find some exceptional instances where territorial processes of a very local origin may have been more significant than usual. The widely quoted ones (the District Council elections in Leicester and the NF's campaigns in the parliamentary by-elections at Rotherham and Thurrock) all come from 1976. This was a year of maximum mass support for the NF that started after dramatic successes in the May District Council elections, which occurred at precisely the time of a media blitz, complete with the grossest racist innuendoes, on the handling by the West Sussex Department of Social Services of a homeless family of Malawi Asians who had recently arrived at Gatwick Airport. The momentum of these events and of the May local election successes was clearly maintained throughout the ensuing summer and into early 1977, when the NF managed (sometimes also with the National Party) some quite dramatic Borough Council by-election successes in parts of London (in Barnet, Enfield, Lewisham, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth). If one examines the spatial variation in the NF vote in local elections from 1976 to 1979 within those cities where the consistent presence of a city-wide slate of candidates permits a fully valid comparison, the earlier cases tend to show the greatest spatial concentration in NF support. This is true ward-by-ward in Leicester (comparing 1976 with 1977 and 1979), in Bradford (comparing 1976 with 1977 and 1978) and in Wolverhampton (1977 with 1978 and 1979), suggesting both that the territorial factor in NF support retreated as overall support for the party declined and also that such a component was particularly stimulated by the earlier racially sensitive climate.

The Decline Over Time

The issue of why NF vote support has declined over time and the implication of this for the wider political system can both be addressed if one analyses some of the party's General Election performances of May 3 with a greater attention to variations in the pattern of this decline in those seats fought in both October 1974 and May 1979. Of special interest is the matter of who were the recipients of its earlier support. There are *a priori* reasons as well as much other evidence to suspect that the NF's decline contributed—albeit marginally because of the initial small size of the earlier NF vote—to the Conservative victory, and one can isolate certain types of constituency where it is reasonable to suggest that the Conservatives received much of this vote.[12]

If, for example, one examines the 12 Inner London or the 11 West Midlands constituencies where the NF ran in both 1974 and 1979, there is a strong correlation—one that survives controls for possible confounding variables—between the absolute percentages of NF loss and those of Conservative gain. However, one must mention that, although these relationships hold among Inner London and West Midlands urban seats, they are not always to be found among other groups of usually more Conservative seats where the NF fought on both occasions. There have been a few instances, usually but not always in lesser NF strongholds, where the earlier vote did not go straight to the Conservatives. Indeed, much of the dramatic decline in NF support in Bradford's District Council elections between 1976 and 1978 has been attributed to numerous one-time NF voters returning to Labour after a successful local anti-NF campaign.[13]

Two Factors

However, in most urban situations with relatively high 1974 NF support it is still plausible to suggest that the NF's failure is attributable to two particular factors: firstly and most importantly, the successful and relatively unobtrusive co-optation by the Conservatives of the NF's major theme of race and immigration, a co-optation made all the easier by the fact that most of the electorate always saw the Conservatives as the likely winners of the General Election; and secondly, closely related, the purpose-

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 159, and Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 198, 218.

[11] This viewpoint is elaborated in Husbands, "The 'threat' hypothesis . . .", pp. 147-74.

[12] It must be pointed out that inferences from aggregate, constituency-level data can legitimately be made only under some rigorous statistical assumptions and this caveat should in fairness be borne in mind when assessing some of what follows.

[13] [Bradford] *Telegraph & Argus*, May 5, 1978, p. 8.

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lessness of giving a general-election vote to the National Front in the present electoral system when such a vote may with similar motivation but rather greater political impact be awarded to the Conservative Party. The NF has therefore been hurt by tactical racist voting and the effects of this have undoubtedly become one element in the political syndrome of Thatcherism, as the Conservative Party itself has shifted towards an explicit adoption of NF orientations.

The assertion of the Conservative appeal in the General Election among former NF voters is consistent with other aspects of the elections held on May 3. Thus, in the District Council election contests on the same day numerous voters in, for example, Birmingham and Leicester, were willing to engage in what might be termed *panachage*-voting, that is, voting for a major party (usually Conservative) in the general election and for the NF candidate in the corresponding local contest. Furthermore, higher levels of NF vote-support continue to be found where there are no minor-party candidacies, particularly no Liberal candidate.[14] In past comment on NF support much has been made of the apparent mutual substitutability of some NF and some Liberal voting, a substitutability that was supposedly revealed by this particular predictor of NF support. This predictive relationship purportedly sustained the argument that the NF vote contained a large component of mere protest voters who lacked any deeply ingrained racist motivation. Any decline in the relationship between the absence of a Liberal and the higher level of NF support in a particular contest would therefore corroborate the view that the party's decline in mass support is to be explained by the erosion of much of an earlier protest component. However, the evidence for a decline in the relationship of Liberal absence and higher NF support is at best ambiguous, which suggests that the NF vote has always been and remains much more race-motivated than is conceded by depictions of it as mere protest voting. The party's electoral decline is not then to be explained by a growing awareness within that body of its earlier supporters who comprised its supposed protest component that the NF is a more risky vehicle for such voting than, say, the Liberals. Instead, as the Conservative Party has shifted, there has developed an increasing perception that this is the more appropriate recipient for a race-motivated vote and this perception has taken root relatively uniformly among all the types of NF voter who were to be found among the party's support in its halcyon days of 1976 and early 1977.

[14] See, for example, C. T. Husbands, "The National Front: a response to crisis?", *New Society*, May 15, 1975, pp. 403-5.

The racially charged political climate of 1976, which undoubtedly produced much spontaneous NF voting in local elections and by-elections of that year, has moderated but the sentiments upon which it drew may well have settled down within the Conservative Party's vote in a more long-term and rational calculation of personal advantage.

The Role of Anti-Fascist Activities

If this is true, it obliges all anti-fascists accurately to analyse the effects of their activities against the NF during the last several years. It must be strongly emphasised that I do not imply by this statement any belittlement or criticism but rather the need to bring a full analytic approach to the vital task of understanding in what precise respects the activities of anti-fascists—particularly of course the Anti-Nazi League because of the national publicity about its activities—have produced definite results and in what spheres the effects are less easy to assess.

The fall in mass NF support from the extraordinary levels it was able to achieve in the special circumstances of 1976 might well have happened anyway, even if perhaps less quickly. It would never have been easy in a two-party system for a new party without deep historical resonances within the mass electorate to maintain such momentum. The view that such support may well have converted to the Conservatives with its racist motivation relatively unimpaired is consistent with available survey evidence. One study has shown, for example, that a larger proportion of Conservative than of Labour inner-city white voters would have been detached by the NF in the May General Election if the political climate had been propitious to the Front rather than the Conservatives.[15] As most of the ANL's protagonists well realise, the League may have successfully denigrated the NF but it has scarcely scratched the surface of native racist sentiment.

In assessing this perhaps controversial assertion it should be recalled that the most successful and publicised ANL activities against the NF began only in late 1977 and early 1978, whereas those who had examined the appropriate election results had already noted substantial declines in NF vote-support in the May 1977 County Council elections compared with the District Council results of the previous year.[16] The May 1977 Greater London Council elections, when the NF averaged 5.1 per cent of votes cast in 91 constituencies fought out of 92, were the supposed catalyst to the formation

[15] C. T. Husbands and J. England, "Will Thatcher lose the racist vote?", *New Statesman*, April 20, 1979, pp. 542-4.

[16] C. T. Husbands, "The National Front Becalmed?", *Wiener Library Bulletin* (1977), pp. 74-9.

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of the ANL but there can be no doubt that the NF performance overall would have been much higher in the previous year if there had been a full set of GLC or Borough Council elections then; the results of several Borough Council by-elections that were held in London in 1976 and early 1977 provide ample testimony to that.

The ANL's campaign against the NF has been successful, as various pieces of more or less systematic evidence show, in diffusing the NF's Nazi image throughout the wider public. Moreover, Granada Television's *World in Action* exposé of the NF broadcast on July 3, 1978 was also significant in diffusing knowledge about the violence of the NF as an organisation. However, it remains difficult to pinpoint precisely how this more accurate image of the NF has contributed to its decline. In a study conducted by the author numerous one-time NF voters do mention this as a factor in their discontinued support of the party but one suspects that many of them are merely offering a more socially acceptable reason to excuse their one-time "lapse" into NF voting. A more direct reason for the NF's decline is its failure in the eyes of many of its former supporters to deliver what it genuinely seemed to them to be promising that it could. For it is hard to escape the conclusion that—in the racially tense climate of two and three years ago—many NF voters were confused enough to think that in some almost magical way their support for the NF would somehow remove black settlement from their neighbourhoods and the perceived attendant pressures on local jobs and housing. While an aura of extremism, violence and failure is clearly detrimental to the NF's future electoral credibility and viability, it does nothing to touch the extent of domestic racism.

One of the great achievements of the ANL has been the co-ordination of anti-NF activity among sections of youth, particularly through the Carnivals. Though these were perhaps viewed with scepticism and ambivalence by much of the non-participating public, they have diffused and legitimated anti-racist activism far more widely and successfully than almost any other medium could have done. Equally telling and effective has been the ability of the ANL to co-ordinate successful opposition to certain localised instances of racist vigilantism, the most famous example of which has of course been the violence against Asians in London's Brick Lane area.

Repercussions on Race and Immigration Policy

If many ex-NF voters have now turned to the Conservative Party, there may well be unsavoury consequences in the areas of race and immigration policy. In her explicit bid for this support in her notorious "swamping" speech and by other inducements Mrs. Thatcher may have offered a hostage to fortune. She may be expected to introduce some dramatic and significant policy on race and immigration, or at least a gesture, if she is to show that she is willing to "deliver" on the issue. As long as the economy retains a certain stability, the pressure upon her to do this is mitigated,[17] but a deterioration of the economic situation, particularly if exacerbated by the monetarist retrenchment of the public sector, could force her hand. She might then see a choice between losing this race-based constituency back to the NF and commitment to a more repressive policy on race that is based on more or less subtle inducements to repatriation, a practice that some on the Left[18] see as already operating and one for which France and the Federal Republic of Germany—countries with a brutally functional attitude in the public and the government toward their migrant labour forces—provide models. The implementation of the scheme to prepare a list of immigrants' dependants is already a certainty.

The Future of the NF

Even so, an excessively materialist perspective on the possibility of an NF resurgence during the lifetime of the Conservative Government may be inappropriate, even if the economic circumstances do assume the earlier propitiousness of 1976, since it ignores the relevance of the sorts of political factors discussed in a previous section. So-called "flash" parties—as some political scientists call them and of which the French Poujadist movement is the classic example, parties like the NF that lack the sort of deep historical roots in the electorate held by the Italian MSI—are likely victims of a "semi-*soufflé*" phenomenon. That is, they may rise once, as did the NF in 1972 and 1973 during the Uganda Asians affair, and then collapse; they may perhaps rise again, as the NF was able to do in 1976 and early 1977. However, there is a limit to this pattern of ups and downs, since such a party eventually loses electoral credibility if its one-time supporters themselves come to regard it as a failure. as seems to be the case with the NF since its most recent decline. A successor movement to the NF does not

[17] One should point out that, even if longer-term economic prospects have scarcely improved since 1976, shorter-term ones may have done and there is evidence from polling data of slightly lesser degrees of public pessimism about personal and national economic prospects than was true three years ago. The peak of NF support was in a period of considerable mass misgiving about the economy, when the general index of retail prices was rising faster than basic weekly wage rates for manual workers in all industries.

[18] A. Sivanandan, "From immigration control to 'induced repatriation' ", Institute of Race Relations pamphlet.

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appear a likely outcome in the short term but, if ex-NF Conservatives do become disgruntled, this is one longer-term possibility. A new Enoch Powell, even if not Enoch Powell himself, or an English Mogens Glistrup, who established the Danish Progress Party—such a leader could reactivate those material dynamics that produced the earlier levels of NF support and that continue to have a structural existence.

The NF itself will doubtless retrench into localised areas where it still retains some modest support within the electorate. Its interest in elections *per se* will almost certainly diminish, but its potential for serious harm by implicitly or explicitly encouraging various types of vigilantism by white youths against black people in the competitive context of the inner city remains serious.[19]

As an organisation the NF faces division and schism; its current internal turmoil is based on differences about doctrine and strategy amid mutual recriminations about the election disaster. However, the argument does seem to be focusing on the hindrance to any future recovery of the party of Tyndall as Chairman and Webster as National Activities Organiser. There may be a replay of the split of 1975 and early 1976 that produced the short-lived National Party. Tyndall and Webster survived that because they managed to retain control of much of the party machinery and, more important, because they retained the organisational name whose widespread recognition within the electorate during a period of greatly increased public sensitivity to race and immigration gave them a large advantage over the break-away group. However, political circumstances have changed since 1976. Successful survival if a further split occurs may be more than they can manage.

[19] Examples of harassment and vigilantism are documented in Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council, *Blood on the Streets: A Report by Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council on Racial Attacks in East London* (September 1978).

Uneven Development: Communist Strategy from the 1940s to the 1970s

Andrew Chester

This article discusses two intriguing questions of communist history. Firstly, when and why was the idea of "Soviet Power" replaced by a "British Road to Socialism"? The answer to this question contains some surprises. Secondly, why is the current edition of the *British Road to Socialism* so different from the first edition of 1951? I will try to illustrate the main forces that have shaped communist strategy over the four editions of the BRS.

These two questions have been written about many times before. But communist writers have frequently explained discontinuities in communist history by changes in "objective" conditions, rather than by contradictions, problems, gaps and mistakes made by communists. In this way the field of communist history has been abandoned often to those who wish to use it maliciously. What is worse, our own ability to drive forward our understanding is held up by these attempts at justification. It may be true that dishonest practices such as the rewriting of historical documents has been rare in British Communist history.[1] Nevertheless, it is also true that we don't yet have a tolerably accurate version of our recent history. In the light of this, what follows is not intended to be a "balanced" account. Given the present state of knowledge in this area, not to mention the limitations of space, it could not

[1] But not absent: see the 1953 edition of the *Selected Speeches of Harry Pollitt, Vol. II*, in which a reference to Soviet Power made in his 1935 speech to the 7th World Congress of the Communist International was deleted. The original text of the speech was published by the Party as a pamphlet in 1935.

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be. Instead it stresses the contradictory and uneven development of strategic thinking, attempts to explain it, and draws some critical conclusions.

Popular Front Strategic Problem

The constant aim of communist strategy from the foundation of the Party until just after the start of WW2 was "the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of Soviet Power". In a nutshell it was envisaged that the socialist revolution would take the form of a violent crisis in the course of which Councils or committees based on places of work would become the basis of a working class power which would challenge and abolish parliamentary institutions. After the rise of fascism it was realised that this could not be put forward as a realistic immediate aim.[2] At the 7th World Congress of the Communist International in 1935 it was proclaimed that the first objective of all Communist Parties would be the creation of broad alliances against fascism and international war. A key aim of these "Popular Fronts" was the preservation of democratic political institutions in capitalist countries from destruction by fascism. If successful the Popular Front strategy was expected to yield opportunities for advance to socialism, via the establishment of Soviet Power—i.e. the abolition of existing representative political institutions provided they could first be saved from fascism.

Was this a realistic political objective? We can only speculate that it was not, since no section of the Communist International had to face the transition between Popular Front and Soviet Power in practice. The Popular Front of the Spanish Republic came nearest to facing the problem. During the Spanish war, according to the Soviet authors of the *Outline History of the Communist International* (Progress, 1971), "The democratic revolution developing within the country went far beyond the bounds of any previously known bourgeois-democratic revolutions. Its nature and aims became an object of searching scrutiny in the governing bodies of the Comintern . . ." (p. 417). Dimitrov stated at a meeting of the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in 1936 that a Spanish state dominated by the popular front could be theoretically expressed as "a special form of the democratic dictatorship of the working class and peasantry" (*ibid*). Togliatti coined the opaque phrase "New Democracy" to denote the break with previous experience. But there is no evidence that the discussions on the Spanish Popular Front led Comintern leaders to conclude definitely that further advance to socialism would take place without a Soviet revolution.

The victory of Franco in Spain cut off the most advanced source of experience of Popular Fronts before the relationship of the New Democracy to the stages strategy put forward at the 7th WCCI could become clear. Certainly there was no question of these discussions on the Spanish Popular Front leading to a rejection of the aim of Soviet Power in Britain. In 1939 this aim was reiterated in the *Draft Programme*, consideration of which was ended by the outbreak of war.

Wartime Change

The Popular Front did not create alliances within and between countries on a wide enough scale to prevent war, let alone to produce opportunities for advance to socialism. It was only *during* the war that the Popular Front strategy came to fruition. The international alliance of the USA, USSR, and Great Britain; broad social co-operation against fascism in occupied and unoccupied countries; the surge of national liberation movements in the colonial empires; all these factors arose during the war and made a successful anti-fascist struggle possible. They combined in complex ways in an immense variety of circumstances. In a number of countries Popular Front-type movements were strong enough by the end of the war or just afterwards to vindicate the idea that a successful anti-fascist struggle would open new opportunities for advance to socialism. It was in these circumstances that the strategic problem of the Popular Front had to be tackled both in theory and practice.

How did the strategic view of the British Party change during the war? References to the aim of Soviet Power ceased in the early part of the war, but no new strategic aim crystallised. This can be illustrated by examining an important pamphlet published in 1944: *How to Win the Peace* by Harry Pollitt. After running through the positive changes in the world balance of forces he concluded that ". . . a new world is being born—not yet a Socialist world, but one that is already a tremendous advance towards Socialism" (p. 16). Reflecting the optimistic view that the international co-operation built up in the war could and should continue into peace he asked "Who really believes the scare stories of the coming domination of the rest of Europe by Anglo-American imperialism . . .?" Instead, ". . . new democracies will be established, in which, at the General Elections which will take place, broad, democratic People's Governments will be elected all over Europe . . .". While "In Britain, we are confident that at any General Election that takes place, provided there is Labour and progressive unity, the people will elect a House of Commons in which there will be a majority of Labour, Com-

[2] For details of why Soviet Power was regarded as a more, or less immediate aim at different times see Monty Johnstone's article in MTD September 1978.

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munist and progressive Members of Parliament". Now, although *How to Win the Peace* was not a pamphlet simply about the immediate situation (indeed, the quotations above come from a chapter entitled "The Advance to Socialism") there was no indication of what *form* the transition to Socialism would take. There was no mention of Soviet Power, but nothing to replace it other than the idea that the programme proposed for the Parliamentary alliance envisaged would be a step towards a Socialist Britain, one which would "further change the people" (p. 87).

Although the Party approached the end of the war without a clear idea of the form of transition to Socialism, there was optimism about the future. The membership and influence of the Party had increased enormously during the war, intermingling with the widespread radicalisation of those years. In the General Election of 1945 the Party's poll was its highest ever by far. The Labour Party came to power on a manifesto that was Socialist in tone and content. The immediate task was to push forward the movement, which naturally led to the question: in the event of success (which seemed quite likely at first)—what next?

The specifically British answer to this came in 1947 with the publication of Pollitt's book *Looking Ahead*, as is well known. In a key passage he wrote that

> ". . . in the measure to which the labour movement is united, in the measure to which it presses forward energetically for the fulfilment of its programme, the development of a general economic plan, extended nationalisation, reduction of rent, interest and profit, democratisation of the armed forces, the courts and the state, increased working-class and popular control of industry, new recruitment of personnel from the labour movement for every part of the state machine—to that measure it will succeed in changing conditions in Britain. In that measure it will reduce the power of the capitalist class, increase the power and control of the workers and the people, and carry Britain along a new, British road to socialism in which British democratic institutions will be preserved and strengthened, and which will not necessarily be the road the Russian workers and peasants were compelled to take in 1917" (p. 92).

Looking Ahead Foreshadowed

What is less well known is the influence of political events in Eastern Europe, ideological developments in the international communist movement and—not least—the personal viewpoint of Stalin, all of which foreshadowed *Looking Ahead*. Bear in mind that as Spain had been briefly the source of the most advanced experience of the Popular Front before the war, the Eastern European countries had the most advanced post-war Popular Front-type governments. The discrediting of collaborators with Nazism, the influence of the Soviet Union and the Red Army, and the construction of broad anti-fascist resistance movements all played a role (in varying degrees in different countries) in making this so. Bear in mind also that although the Comintern was dissolved in 1943 communists did not cease to look to Moscow for guidance. And Stalin had greater personal prestige than ever because of the war.

The operation of these factors and their connection with Britain can be illustrated by the following extraordinary quotation from the Minutes of a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, September 1946. The speaker is Klement Gottwald, General Secretary of the CPC:

> "Very likely you have read in the press the news of Comrade Stalin's talk with a delegation of British Labour Party members. It was a discussion with officials of the Labour Party the main subject of which was summed up in the *Daily Herald* by one of the participants, M. Phillips. He says, *inter alia*, there are two roads to socialism, one is the Russian, the other the British, and it is clear that each in its own way intends to achieve its socialist goals. The Russian path is shorter but more difficult and has brought with it bloodletting. Nevertheless it is necessary to keep in mind that the followers of Marx and Lenin do not regard this as the only path leading to socialism. *The Parliamentary path is not one of bloodletting, but it is a longer path.*
>
> This was a conversation in which Comrade Stalin touched on the different paths of socialism. During my last visit to Moscow I had a similar conversation with Stalin. Comrade Stalin said that as experience has shown and as the classics of Marxism-Leninism teach us, there does not exist only one path leading through Soviets and the dictatorship of the proletariat. . . ." (Quoted in *History of Socialism Yearbook, Prague* 1968, p. 123.) (Emphasis added—AC.)

Furthermore Gottwald relayed that "Stalin expressly said: Our path was shorter, faster—and it cost much blood and victims. If you can avoid it, then avoid it".

The British Party also had a view on the remarks of Stalin to Morgan Phillips. In 1946 the *Daily Worker* issued a leaflet actually headed in bold lettering "The British Road to Socialism". This rejected Morgan Phillip's conclusion drawn from his talk with Stalin, which was that since Britain could advance along a Parliamentary road the Communist Party should disband! Instead it asserted that "The Communist Party in Britain has always emphasised these historical differences to which Stalin referred; it has always stressed what can be achieved in this country by orderly and peaceful progress through democratic opportunity and the strength of the workers' mass organisations . . .". In fact, of course, before World War Two

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the Party had always stressed how *little* could be so achieved because of the "unreal" nature of bourgeois democracy. The whole argument for Soviet Power was based on the idea that Parliament was a sham democracy which had to be replaced by real democracy based on workers' Councils or Soviets.

The personal view of Stalin was one factor in changing strategic thinking. Other influences were the political development of Eastern Europe, the interpretation of statements made by communist leaders there, and the comparisons made with Britain. These were pulled together in 1947 by Kitty Cornforth in a piece of writing unique for this period, in which she analysed the change in the British Party's strategy. She stated that although in the past the Party had envisaged the struggle for power as a violent one leading to the replacement of parliament and the rest of the old state apparatus with new organs of government, it was necessary to study the question again. There was a new favourable balance of class forces in the world. There was the new road to socialism foreseen by the Communist Parties of the new democracies. She quoted Bienkowski's speech to the 19th Congress of the British Party in which he described the outlook for Poland as "a peaceful and evolutionary advance towards Socialism". This was not a reformist view, she argued, because Bienkowski did not see the state as neutral: in the new democracies capitalist power in the state *had* been attacked. But herein lay the difference with Britain, where the roots of capitalist power were essentially untouched. "Hence, unlike the new democracies, we still face the question of how state power is to be taken out of the hands of the capitalist class." The Economic Plan and new foreign policy that the Party was fighting for would raise the question of class power in a new way.

The struggle for these policies would, she then wrote, require big changes in the state apparatus. To achieve this, new forms of democratic organisation had to be developed "from the factory up". These would represent accessions of power to the working people. Thus the point of production would still be the focus of the class struggle. But this would not end in the replacement of Parliament by something altogether different. "Power of the working class and all the people who do useful work could be exercised through a new use of Parliament and a purged and democratised State apparatus, backed by new forms of democratic, popular organisation."[3]

Kitty Cornforth concluded by arguing that this perspective was made possible by the weakened position of the British capitalist class (as shown by its sell-out to the US), and stronger progressive forces in the world as a whole.

Effects of Cold War

Communists were influential in many of the governments set up in Europe as a whole immediately after the Second World War, though they tended to be more influential in Eastern Europe. Initially most of these governments reflected a broad spectrum of forces that had resisted the Nazis and helped the Allies. With the onset of the Cold War in 1947-48 the disintegration of these broad-based governments was intertwined with the breakdown of the international alliance. To put it very crudely, communists were pushed out in Western Europe, and non-communists were pushed out in Eastern Europe. At the same time some of the conceptions held by communists in many countries in the previous period were called revisionist and there was a movement towards greater ideological conformity in the international communist movement.

Up to the outbreak of the Cold War it was frequently asserted that advance to socialism could take place without Soviet Power *and* without the dictatorship of the proletariat (see for example *Looking Ahead* p. 90). But as the Eastern European states began to resemble the Soviet Union in that the Communist Parties held absolute power, the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat was reasserted. There was also a change of nomenclature: "new democracies" became "People's Democracies". It was argued that People's Democracy was the appropriate form of the dictatorship of the proletariat for the prevailing balance of world forces (which was still held to have changed for the better as a result of the war).

It is not surprising that in the bitter atmosphere of the time a much harsher interpretation of the new possibilities of transition to Socialism was accepted by communists in and out of power. The success of the communists in Eastern Europe in resolving political crises in their favour while in Britain and elsewhere communists were getting a battering only reinforced feelings that there were important lessons to be learned from the experiences of those countries. For example the Czech crisis of 1948 was seen as particularly relevant as an instance of an extra-parliamentary movement defeating the intrigues of reaction in a parliamentary system, but without replacing the democratic institution as such.

In line with these developments the idea of a "British Road to Socialism" became incorporated into a family of People's Democracies which embraced the existing states of Eastern Europe and a future Socialist Britain in a manner in some ways reminiscent of the period of the Soviet Power strategy.

[3] *The British Road to Socialism*, *Communist Review*, April 1947, p. 113-18.

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Some Critical Observations

In essence the strategic development discussed so far was a resolution of the Popular Front "problem" by dispensing with Soviet Power. The arguments used to support the new strategic view created further problems, though, because they did not question whether Soviet Power had been a correct aim in British conditions before the Second World War. Sometimes the very existence of the previous strategy was covered up. Even where it was dealt with honestly, as in Kitty Cornforth's article, the need to re-examine the past was obscured by the argument that the new strategy was possible because things had changed as shown by experience in other countries. The capitalist class was said to be *weaker*, the progressive forces were said to be *stronger*.

With hindsight we can see that in Britain at least there were also opposite tendencies. In some ways the changes that took place during the war put the capitalist class in a stronger position. At the same time there were severe weaknesses in the development of working class and socialist forces. The political ideas that captured the radicalisation of the war years were Full Employment, Welfare State and Mixed Economy—not Socialism. Part of the wartime radicalisation was actually the *reconstruction of bourgeois hegemony*, the establishment of new ways of gaining peoples' consent to the continuation of capitalism. This was indeed radical in the sense that it involved the isolation and defeat of the dominant ruling class strategy of the inter-war years, but it was not a sign of weakness.

And where were the forces capable of building new organisations from the factory up that would have represented, in Kitty Cornforth's words, "accessions to working class power"? During the war the Communist Party built up an apparently formidable organisation in the factories but it proved impossible to use this in political action to drive forward the movement in peacetime under the Labour government. Swimming against the tide created by the new form of bourgeois hegemony and the renewed anti-communism and anti-Sovietism was much more difficult than swimming with the tide as had been the case during the war after Germany invaded the Soviet Union.

I'm not suggesting that communists were blind to these problems. *Looking Ahead* and other works of the period were full of trenchant criticisms of the Labour government, pointing out the limited nature of its policies and the need for the labour movement to change its ideas. But the *scale* of the problems had not been appreciated, because of a failure to look again at the system of class power, a system which had proved its strength by pulling the rug from under the Socialist movement just when advance towards socialism seemed certain. Communists continued to operate with a set of ideas about "how the capitalist class rules" which was not very different from that used to argue the plausibility and indeed the necessity of a frontal, insurrectionary assault on the capitalist state.

The British Road—First Edition, 1951

The strengths and limitations of the 1951 *British Road to Socialism* stem from the developments already discussed. The kernel of the strategy can be extracted from a section called "People's Democracy—the Path to Socialism". First, a key passage distinguished the BRS from what many people might have thought the policy of the Party to be:

> "The enemies of Communism accuse the Communist Party of aiming to introduce Soviet Power in Britain and abolish Parliament. This is a slanderous misrepresentation of our policy. Experience has shown that in present conditions the advance to Socialism can be made just as well by a different road. For example, through People's Democracy, without establishing Soviet Power, as in the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe."

The next sentence asserted that "Britain will reach Socialism by her own road", and it was declared that:

> "the people of Britain can transform capitalist democracy into a real People's Democracy, transforming Parliament, the product of Britain's historic struggle for democracy, into the democratic will of the vast majority of her people". (p. 14).

The political force to achieve this transformation was to be a great "Broad Popular Alliance", which would be the social support of a People's Government. It was envisaged that it would be made up of the working people in industry and agriculture together with their families, plus "the great bulk of the clerical and professional workers, the teachers, technicians and scientists, the working farmers, shopkeepers and small businessmen, whose interests are equally threatened by the big landowning, industrial and financial capitalists, and those whose security and future prospects are closely bound up with those of the industrial working class" (p. 13). The main issues expected to act as motors in the creation of the broad alliance were Peace, National Independence (from the US) and a wide-ranging set of economic and social welfare interests. The People's Government would carry out socialist nationalisation, introduce fundamental economic planning, grant national independence to colonies, pursue a peaceful foreign policy and break the political hold of the capitalist class by democratic reforms of state institutions and the media.

This perspective remained essentially unchanged over the first three editions of the BRS. There were

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a large number of elaborations and alterations of points of detail but there is no space to go into them here. In any event the preconditions for a Broad Popular Alliance—social and political struggle on a broad front—were largely absent until the late sixties, early 1970s. True, there was a stream of trade union battles. And there were other social movements, e.g. the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the late 1950s. But it was never possible to link these up into an embryonic Broad Popular Alliance. The range of radical social movements and activities was very narrow, and some which occupy the centre of the stage today were virtually non-existent—for instance the Women's Movement. It should not be forgotten, either, that public activity by communists as communists (as against public activity by communists as members of other organisations) was limited by extreme anti-communism. All these factors restricted the practical political experience of the whole Party, and they can be added to the critical observations made earlier in order to explain the uneven development of the *British Road to Socialism* as a strategy appropriate to specifically British conditions.

Political Democracy under Socialism

The first revision of the BRS was made as a direct result of political crisis in the Socialist countries. The 1951 edition said nothing specific about the nature of political rights under Socialism. In fact, because the path to Socialism was called People's Democracy, readers of the 1951 edition could infer that what was meant was something very similar to the Communist absolutism of the People's Democracies in eastern Europe. After the crises in Poland and Hungary in 1956, following closely on Khruschev's revelations about violations of Socialist legality under Stalin, such an identification of the *British Road* and People's Democracy became untenable. The term People's Democracy was dropped. The section headed "Socialist Democracy" in the 1957 edition of the BRS made it clear that parties other than the Labour and Communist Parties would retain the right "to maintain their organisations, party publications and propaganda, and to take part in elections . . . provided that these parties conform to the law" (p. 23). The heritage of civil liberties built up in centuries of struggle would not only be preserved but extended. In general, "The institutions of a Socialist Britain need to be such as to encourage and keep alive the democratic spirit, encourage criticism from below, discourage bureaucracy and arbitrary decisions from above." (p. 24).

In retrospect these ideas may not seem so fundamentally significant, but they were in the sense that for the first time a change in communist strategy had been brought about by criticisms of existing practices in the socialist countries, albeit only after the point of political crisis had been reached. Even then, recognition of their significance was delayed for many people in the Party until the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Those who agreed with the Soviet Union in seeing "counter-revolution" in the stirrings of political pluralism during the Prague Spring also began to see more far-reaching implications in the *British Road* than they had before. It would not be too much of a caricature to say that they desired a return to the international conformity and the ambiguity, not to say vagueness, of the 1951 BRS. This atavistic longing reached its height in the debate over the latest revision of the BRS, but was a delayed reaction to changes made as long ago as 1956-57.

From Crisis of Socialism to Crisis of Capitalism

The 1967 edition of the BRS did not represent any watershed in communist strategic thinking in the way the other three editions have done. Rather, it was an elaboration of the changes discussed so far. However, it was important for other reasons. It became the focus not only of the inner-Party controversy over Socialist democracy, but also the criticisms of the ultra-left which grew so explosively from 1968. More significant still, for the first time since the BRS strategy was formally adopted in 1951 it was possible to assess its relevance to actual political practice amid the social crisis of the early 1970s industrial militancy, and the rise of new radical social movements. Finally, it was this edition that was measured against the insights gained from the regeneration of marxist political theory which made its main impact on the Party after 1967. In dealing with the development between the 1967 and 1977 BRS I will focus on the two areas where the biggest changes took place—the nature of the broad alliance and the nature of capitalist power.

These two areas are linked. The forces that can be gathered for political change have to be matched to the power to be challenged. How was this done in the 1967 BRS? It was argued that the potential for a Broad Alliance lay among "all those whose lives are immediately affected by policies framed to perpetuate and uphold monopoly capitalism". Who were "all those"? Answer: "workers in factories, offices, professions, working farmers, producers and consumers, owner-occupiers and tenants, housewives, young people and students, pensioners, workers in the peace movement and those active in defence of democracy" (p. 28). This vast array of social forces was prevented from overturning capitalism by the immense powers of the monopoly capitalists, who *controlled* or *conditioned* economic, political and ideological institutions. Every facet of support for the capitalist order

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could be traced back to the "same small group" of capitalist puppetmasters. The impression one gets from the 1967 BRS (and even more so from the two earlier editions) is that a vast movement could come into being which would, after sweeping aside the right wing of the labour movement, come face to face with a tiny group of monopoly capitalists. Given that the Broad Popular Alliance could thwart attempts to resort to repression the outcome would be a Socialist parliamentary government, carrying through socialist nationalisation, planning, a peaceful foreign policy and so on.

The development of new social movements whose aims and historical significance could not be reduced to "fighting against the monopolies" created doubts about the sort of Broad Popular Alliance specified above. On the one hand there were some in the Party who resolved their doubts by adopting an "economic" class approach, crystallising the idea of an Anti-Monopoly Alliance as the class essence of the Broad Popular Alliance. On the other hand there were those who realised that the specification of the Broad Popular Alliance in the 1967 edition was ambiguous, but wanted to resolve the problem by defining more clearly the relationships that could exist between class forces and other social movements, such as the women's movement, which are not class-based. Naturally it was also necessary to review the definition of the *aim* of the Broad Popular Alliance (given that, as with the Popular Fronts, it would not arise in the first instance as a purely Socialist movement). The outcome of discussions about the strategic "broad alliance" can be summed up in the fact that the Broad Popular Alliance of 1951-67 was replaced by a Broad Democratic Alliance, not an Anti-Monopoly Alliance, in the 1977 revision.

The second area of major change between 1967 and 1977 BRS's concerns the nature of capitalist power. The view in which this power derives from the abilities of a tiny group of capitalists to *control* and *condition* a huge variety of institutions can be compared with that in which the capitalist class directs or steers society by gaining the *active consent* of other classes (and social groups not based on classes). Capitalist power then becomes a matter of constructing and maintaining social alliances through an ensemble of voluntary institutions such as political parties, trade unions, churches, youth organisations, women's organisations and so on. The capitalist class is connected with such "civil society" institutions in many ways, which cannot be simply summed up as "control", but rather as the leader and organiser of a social alliance. It is this process which produces "rule by consent" in the foreground of a parliamentary democracy such as Britain, though this is always combined with a system of coercion in the background.

Such a view of capitalist power has profound consequences for revolutionary strategy, because it poses the task of defeating capitalist leadership in civil society institutions as well as challenging its state power. It is true that in the first three editions of the BRS *one facet* of this task was present—namely the defeat of the right-wing in the labour movement—but there is far more to the capitalist "broad alliance" than that. Perhaps if the Party had analysed more closely the reasons for the defeat of the 1945-51 Labour Government it would have realised that the right-wing sell-out was only the tip of an iceberg of obstacles created by the reconstructed capitalist leadership in that period. It would have recognised the full measure of the strengths of capitalist power as well as its weaknesses.

Seen in this light, the recent discussion in the Party which led to the 1977 BRS, informed by the experience of the social crisis of the early 1970s, industrial militancy, the rise of new social movements, and the regeneration of Marxist political theory, represents a break in Communist Party history at least as important as the changeover from Soviet Power to BRS after the Second World War. It is now possible to build on a more realistic view of the nature of capitalist power and how it is maintained, and also a better understanding of the nature of the forces that can be brought together to challenge that power.

Uneven Development—Conclusions

There have been three main turning points in the development of communist strategy since the early 1940s. The first was the dropping of Soviet Power, which resolved a crucial strategic problem of the Popular Front period. But no-one asked the question of British history that Gramsci asked of Italian history, namely—was there something about the nature of capitalist power in Britain that made Soviet Power unrealistic in the first place? Instead the new strategy was justified by allusions to international experience and the weakness of the capitalist class after the Second World War. The significance of the reconstruction of bourgeois hegemony during the war as a factor offsetting this weakness was not recognised.

The second turning point was a result of political crisis in the Socialist countries in the mid-1950s. The nature of socialist democracy was clarified, and the idea of political pluralism and extended civil rights under Socialism were introduced in the 1957 BRS. The full significance of these changes became apparent to the whole Party only after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Apart from the changes concerning socialist democracy the first three editions of the BRS contained a similar strategic view, differing in details and degree of elaboration.

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The third turning point came in the discussions leading up to the 1977 BRS, when the ambiguity of the specifications of the Broad Popular Alliance and the inadequacy of the notion of capitalist power in the first three editions came under scrutiny.

I hope I have shown that the present BRS can be seen in perspective as the result of a long and complex process which has been contradictory and uneven. This isn't surprising, because the Communist Party is neither monolithic nor omniscient, and history does not pose questions according to the logical progression of a theoretical scheme. Nevertheless if the Party had been more determined to understand the lessons of British history and less concerned to justify its own past the process might have been less drawn out. The Party might have been less a victim of a lack of relevant political experience if it had asked itself a couple of key questions two or three decades ago! And who's to say that the key questions have all been asked even now? Having said that, the *British Road to Socialism* clearly represents an important historical achievement for the Party and the left.

Review:

"Beyond the Fragments"—what does it offer the left?

Caroline Rowan

The Tory victory in the General Election and the development of a new popular right wing consensus have shown clearly that the left needs to relate its politics more closely to people's everyday lives. The ability of the Tories to do this was largely responsible for their success. The women's movement can play an important part in developing a socialist politics and culture that can counter this because it has always been concerned with lived experience, so *Beyond the Fragments—feminism and the making of socialism* could not have appeared at a more opportune moment.

It is a collection of three essays by Hilary Wainright, Lynne Segal and Sheila Rowbotham, about the relationship between the women's movement and the left. The Introduction by Hilary Wainright and the concluding piece "A local experience" by Lynne Segal, raise general questions in the context of the author's own experience. These questions are discussed at greater length and in a more theoretical way in Sheila Rowbotham's piece "The women's movement and organising for socialism". For reasons of limited space, I shall concentrate on the latter piece.

While it clearly starts from the need for an alliance between feminism and the left, and the belief that women's liberation can only exist as part of a wider struggle for socialism, the book stresses that this does not mean the subordination of the Women's Liberation Movement to the left: "The exchange must be between equals and the learning process two-way." It therefore challenges the assumption which is implicit, sometimes even explicit in socialist politics, that the women's movement needs the left more than the left needs the women's movement. It opens up the debate on socialist organisation and strategy in a way that questions many aspects of traditional socialist politics. Although it does not provide all the answers—and indeed does not claim to—it represents the first substantive statement of what the left can learn from the women's movement.

Learning from experience

A major contribution of the WLM to left politics has been its insistence on the validity of personal experience, summed up in the now well-worn slogan "The personal is political". Sheila Rowbotham claims that:

> "Our views are valid because they come from within us, and not because we hold a received correctness." (p 19).

This has broadened the scope of socialism to include far more centrally the quality of life and human relationships.

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The recognition that personal and cultural experience could be a factor in the subordination of groups such as blacks, women and gays led to the widening of the concept of "exploitation" (with its emphasis on the economic sphere) to the more inclusive one of "oppression". However, Sheila Rowbotham herself recognises that this involves certain problems. Because oppression is rather a vague concept, which says nothing about the social relations which cause it, it is not very useful in helping us define a strategy to overcome it. On the contrary it:

> "fixes people in their role as victim, rather than pointing to the contradictory relations which force the emergence of new forms of consciousness. The stress on the way capitalism devours our whole beings could lead to a fatalism once the initial voluntarist enthusiasm was exhausted." (p 14).

However, I do not feel that she fully solves the problem of seeing people as more than "the category of oppression" (p. 68). Her use of Marx's theory of alienation (drawing on Zillah Eisenstein's "Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism") is no solution; it merely posits an ideal human essence as an alternative to the present (oppressed) existence. Her claim that this is not abstract, but an essence we can understand in historical contexts, is not substantiated. It still remains an imagined and ideal essence, which we are moving towards with more or less inevitability. The goal (essence) is pre-determined, but the means for achieving it are not specified:

> "Reality for Marx is more than mere existence. It embodies within it a movement towards human essence. . . . By locating revolutionary potential as it reflects conflicts between people's real conditions (existence) and possibilities (essence), we understand how patriarchal relations inhibit the development of human essence." (p 69).

In other words, it gives us no more ideas as to the kind of strategy required than the concept of oppression itself.

A further problem is the relationship between experience and theory. The author shares with Edward Thompson a hostility to abstract theory "hanging above us in a kind of a-historical space". (p. 28). Theory is historically specific and has no universal validity:

> "ideas come from our experience of our lives, from the past wisdom of others and from the movement for change. Our efforts to abstract upon our practice and history through theories of how to make socialism, for example, are not good for all time".

Our theory must therefore be constantly re-examined in the light of changing historical situations.

This approach provides a useful corrective to some Althusserian concepts of theory as the development of a pure science, purged of all historical and empirical impurities. However, theory cannot be simply "read off" from experience. The absence from the book of any rules for abstracting theory from experience lays the author open to charges of pragmatism or of simply reversing the usual order of events, by setting experience above theory, without bringing them into line with one another.

Leninism and organising for socialism

The authors are unanimous in their hostility to Leninism. They see it as being fundamentally flawed by hierarchical structures, which allow theory to be handed down from above as fixed dogma and which all too often stifle grass roots initiatives. They are also opposed to the Leninist party's assumption of a vanguard role in relation to other movements.

Whether or not democratic centralism is inherently undemocratic or merely frequently abused, Sheila Rowbotham claims that the experience of this century shows that it leads to authoritarian structures, whose leadership tends to be self-perpetuating. In contrast, the women's movement operates the principle of "participatory democracy", where those who do the work take the decisions, leadership is dispersed rather than centralised and discipline, where it is necessary, is collective rather than hierarchical. Sheila Rowbotham does not present participatory democracy as the answer or underplay its numerous problems, but it is undeniably an alternative which makes for:

> "an approach to organisation which is prepared to test forms and discard or select according to the situation rather than asserting a universally correct mode. It also means that the 'movement' is perpetually outwards. As women encounter feminism they can make their own kinds of organising depending on their needs". (p 40).

I do not intend to discuss whether or not Sheila Rowbotham is misrepresenting Lenin, because she is not talking about a theoretically pure form of organisation elaborated by the master, but about Leninism as a contemporary political practice. There are problems with her characterisation of Leninist organisation, democratic centralism and the Party as a homogeneous practice, applicable to the whole of the left. Her frequent references to "orthodox Leninism" often obscure important differences between organisations and parties on the left. In describing Leninism, she draws heavily on her

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experience of IS/SWP, so that, although the book is addressed to the left, it applies directly only to one section of it, in which democratic centralism operates in a particular way. This is counter-productive, not only because the differences between parties are important, but also because it makes it easier for us to ignore the general relevance of the questions she raises for all revolutionary organisations. The question of the "right" and "authority" of a party to give leadership to other movements and of the internal democracy of that party is important for any party that claims to give leadership or even, in the case of the Communist Party, "coherence and vision" to the forces on the left.

For Sheila Rowbotham, IS/SWP has more than personal significance. She was drawn to it initially for its ability to break with dogma, learn from new movements and encourage rank and file activity. Because of this, it is important to understand the sticking points which limited its move away from Stalinism and orthodox Trotskyism.

Eurocommunism

There is, however, more than one route out of the Stalinist impasse. I would argue that recent developments in West European Communist Parties, in terms of their attempts at internal democratisation, and in re-evaluating their relationship to other movements represent a more fruitful solution than that of SWP. Granted, progress has been slow, particularly with regard to internal democracy, but the potential merits more attention than it is given in the book. I therefore want to spend some time discussing the implications of Eurocommunism for a new relationship between a revolutionary party and autonomous movements.

Sheila Rowbotham admits that "Eurocommunism has opened up the issue of autonomy in a different context from the classic stress on the Party in Leninism" but she is already misrepresenting the case, by treating Eurocommunism as an undifferentiated monolithic strategy. It is precisely the stress on national roads to socialism, flexible enough to take account of different sets of conditions, and the refusal to adopt new "models" that gives Eurocommunism its potential for a new relationship to autonomous movements.

Neither is she correct in claiming that Eurocommunism aims to "inhabit" rather than "transform" the institutions of power relations. Transforming the structures of government is, certainly for the British CP, a central plank in its strategy.

Moreover, her account stresses this parliamentary aspect at the expense of mass struggle, which is the other main plank in Eurocommunist strategy. As Togliatti said (quoted in Claudin, *Eurocommunism and Socialism*), the revolutionary party must be a party of struggle, as well as a party of government. This is particularly appropriate to Britain, where a broad democratic alliance of forces in struggle is central to the strategy outlined in the *British Road to Socialism*.

Eurocommunist strategy implies the redefinition of the relationship between the revolutionary party and autonomous movements. While this is by no means unproblematic, the commitment to democracy and pluralism and the awareness that the party has no automatic monopoly of working-class leadership open up new possibilities.

If the party is to play a leading role, it must do so, not because of its patent on the truths of Marxism-Leninism, but on the basis of its organic relationship to the progressive forces and movements; it must have both a breadth of vision and an intimate working knowledge and experience of the individual movements. It must also allow for the fullest possible development of autonomous movements and show a greater willingness to respond to them, by changing its own position when necessary. The party does not have to become a political chameleon, changing colour with every new movement, in order to recognise and respond to developments outside the party which strengthen left strategy. On the contrary, failure to do this can result in the party using its strategy as a kind of revolutionary blueprint, valid for all time, and falling into the trap described by Paul Thompson and Guy Lewis in their critique of Trotskyism: "It never situates relations between party and class in changing conditions of struggle, but rather in absolutes of consciousness, spontaneity, the party and the like." ("The Revolution Unfinished", quoted in *Beyond the Fragments*, p. 48).

At present, however, revolutionary forces, including the Communist Party, have not fully developed the organic relationship with autonomous movements which qualifies them to give the kind of leadership described above. *Beyond the Fragments* criticises them, in my view correctly, for their tendency to learn "selectively" from other movements:

> "revolutionary organisations will readily admit that they've learnt about sexism through the women's movement, racism through black organisations, etc. But when it comes to developing the principles of revolutionary politics, the principles of organising which seek to overthrow capitalism as a whole, this has traditionally been the internal concern and monopoly of formally political organisations". (Hilary Wainright, p 3.)

This is a very real question in relation to the women's movement, which demands not only "the acceptance of sexual politics" but also a "different kind of socialism" and different strategies for achieving it. As Sheila Rowbotham points out, the

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women's movement is contesting not simply at the level of programmes and constitutions, but also:

> "how we see ourselves and one another in relation to the movement for change and how we see the forms in which we resist capitalist society".

The dispute is about "an idiom of politics" and even "the power to define what is politics". (p. 36). It also involves contesting the "power relationships within the movement for change", including the relationship of parties to other movements.

Moreover, this is an area where she finds the Communist Party particularly lacking. She criticises the party for failing to alter its conception of socialism to take account of the insights of the women's movement, although it allows feminists space to argue for their position. To those of us inside the CP this may seem a harsh judgement. We can point to ways in which the party's practice and vision of socialism has been broadened by the women's movement. But the fact that progress has been so slow as to be invisible to those outside the party deserves serious attention, if we are to claim an organic relationship with the women's movement. Until we have found a way of relating to the strategic, rather than sectional demands of other movements, we cannot honestly claim to respect their autonomy.

The Need for a Political Party

The book does not deny the need for overall co-ordination of the struggle for socialism. While the experiences of Socialist Centres, described by Hilary Wainwright and Lynne Segal, show that alliances can develop locally and between movements that already define themselves as socialist, they still recognise the need for some form of overall co-ordination and leadership. There are, moreover, real conflicts of interests between movements which must be resolved, if an alliance is to be formed. However, Sheila Rowbotham argues that they must be resolved by open discussion, not by what she calls the "Leninist sleight of hand", which effectively submerges differences by:

> "the assertion of the *ideal* of a Party transcending the interests and vistas of its sections". (p 46).

She therefore argues for:

> "a form of organisation which can at once allow for the open expression of conflict between different groups and develop the particular understandings which all these differences bring to Socialism. For if every form of oppression has its own defensive suspicions, all the movements in resistance to humility and inequality also discover their own wisdoms. We require a socialist movement in which there is freedom for these differences, and nurture for these wisdoms". (p. 46).

The question then is not whether leadership and co-ordination are necessary but whether a political party can provide them. For the authors of *Beyond the Fragments* the answer is clearly No:

> "We recognise that leadership, co-ordination and discipline of a sort will be important in solving these problems, but we question the need or possibility of a single democratic-centralist party as the answer, certainly at this stage, or in the near future." (Hilary Wainright, p. 2.)

While recognising the importance of the arguments against revolutionary parties, as they are constituted at present, I would disagree with this and assert both the need and the possibility of a revolutionary party playing a leading role in the struggle for socialism. The question of political leadership is not discussed explicitly in the book—leadership is seen more in terms of co-ordination and organisation—but the implications of the argument are that political direction will come from the movements themselves, working together in a broad alliance, and that an attempt by any one organisation to give a strategic direction to the struggle for socialism will be an undemocratic imposition "from outside". I agree that so-called "sectional" movements have a great deal more strategic sense than they are usually credited with, and that any "leading" party needs to be far more sensitive to their wisdoms, but I would still maintain that some kind of revolutionary organisation is necessary in order to give strategic coherence to the struggle for socialism.

Moreover, it seems to me that the kind of organisation Sheila Rowbotham describes is not incompatible with the aims of the *British Road to Socialism*, and that, all the foregoing criticism and reservations notwithstanding, the CP has the potential to play a crucial role in this context. In order to do so, further transformation of our internal structures and our relationship to other movements is necessary. We should therefore really confront the questions of autonomy and pluralism raised by the strategy of the Broad Democratic Alliance.

Consciousness and Culture

For Sheila Rowbotham, the question of how consciousness is formed is a major area of difference between the women's movement and "orthodox Leninism". For feminists, she argues, consciousness comes from the experience of oppression and is formed in struggle, whereas Lenin claimed in *What is to be done*? that class political consciousness must come from outside the immediate experience of economic struggle, and is supplied by the vanguard party. She claims that

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> "For Lenin the lessons of consciousness through struggle remain generally subordinate to the leadership of the party"

and that this notion of consciousness represented a decisive break with Marx, who:

> "believed that we make our consciousness in the process of making ourselves and changing the world, within the limits of the particular historical situation in which we find ourselves".

More importantly, however, she argues that Lenin's separation between sectional or corporate consciousness and socialist consciousness is untenable today, when the emergence of radical autonomous movements has proved that socialist consciousness can emerge from the knowledge of one's own oppression, without the help of the vanguard party.

The rigidity of Lenin's separation between sectional consciousness, gained in struggle, and socialist consciousness, unattainable without the vanguard party, may be open to question. This is, however, not central to the argument of the book. What is important here is the fact that this separation has become part of the practice of Leninist parties today—witness their reluctance to acknowledge the strategic demands of other movements.

Rigid Distribution

The main question raised by Sheila Rowbotham's argument is whether a rigid distinction between feminist consciousness, gained from the experience of oppression as women and the struggle against it, and a more general socialist consciousness can be sustained. Of course feminist consciousness has its own specificities but, far from being separate from socialist consciousness, it seems to me that it has contributed greatly to its development. Moreover, socialist consciousness has developed within the women's movement without—sometimes even in spite of—the interventions of vanguard parties.

Having said this, however, I feel that she is overoptimistic about the extent to which this can continue to be a spontaneous process. There are, as she herself admits, real contradictions and conflicts between movements which, if unresolved, are likely to block the development of socialist consciousness. The relationship between experience and consciousness does not therefore, in my view, abolish the need for a party, but it significantly alters its role. If consciousness comes more from the experience of struggle and less from the guidance of a revolutionary vanguard, the party's legitimation no longer comes from its being separate from and above other movements, but from its knowledge of and involvement in them, its understanding of their similarities and differences. A different kind of orientation is needed, which is more open to dialogue on equal terms with other movements.

One of the most illuminating aspects of the book is its analysis of the role, not only of experience, but also of culture (in the wider sense of norms, obligations and beliefs), in forming and transforming consciousness. This opens up the necessity for an alternative socialist and feminist culture:

> "It's not enough for the individual woman to 'know' that she is possessed or dominated; in order not to be possessed or dominated, indeed in order not to want to be, there must be an alternative culture in which such values are seen to be dominant and to be practised (in however erratic a way) in relation to which she can define herself." (Sarah Benton, quoted in *Beyond the Fragments*, p. 70.)

Historical Experience

This means that left strategy must address the wider questions of social and cultural relationships far more centrally than it has done in the recent past. Sheila Rowbotham draws on historical experience of "older" 19th century socialists and revolutionary syndicalists, who, in their stress on solidarity and brotherhood, the creation of schools and alternative marriage ceremonies to attack the hold of established religion, not only understood the need for a protective culture, but also had a vision of a new kind of community, which they were building, both by collectively resisting capitalism and by their "conscious individual commitment" to its values.

She is in no way advocating a return to these older forms of socialist culture. On the contrary, she is critical of their paternal conservatism in relation to the family and their close connection with craft elitism. However, they stand as an important illustration of the close connection between socialist consciousness and culture and the creation of institutions that pre-figure a socialist society.

Prefigurative Forms

Prefigurative forms are a central feature of the contemporary women's movement, evidenced both in the demand that individual socialists should consciously change their personal relationships now, and in the development of a wide range of feminist social and cultural activities. Far from being utopian, prefigurative forms are an important element in changing consciousness and breaking down the distinction between the public and the private, the personal and the political. One of Sheila Rowbotham's most valid criticisms of contemporary revolutionary parties is the incompatibility between their hierarchical structure and the development of relationships within them which are not based on domination and subordination. In

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contrast, she quotes two examples of prefigurative forms from which the left can learn—consciousness-raising and self-help groups. The former has placed personal politics firmly on the political agenda; the latter has posed in a new and particularly fruitful way questions of state responsibility and democratic control, e.g., in the relationship between community nurseries and local councils, or women's health groups and the NHS.

It is also interesting to note the parallel development of prefigurative forms in the women's movement and new strategies for the transition to socialism, in which the distinction between "before" and "after" socialism has become less rigid. There is no cataclysmic moment, after which sexual politics can suddenly be placed on the agenda. Instead, prefigurative forms can form part of a more sophisticated strategy for undermining the state, when it cannot be taken by storm. Self-help and community groups are an example of this.

Conclusion

The women's movement has been in existence for nearly 11 years. During that time the revolutionary left to which *Beyond the Fragments* is principally addressed, has variously attempted to ignore it, marginalise it, educate it, colonise it and recruit from it, before finally beginning to work with it and even sometimes to learn from it. Small wonder then, that the book is scathing about some aspects of left politics. It is almost more surprising that a book about an alliance between feminism and socialism was written at all!

It may be inaccurate in its characterisation of some aspects of left politics and is, in my view, pessimistic about the potential for improvement. Nevertheless, it is on the whole a positive contribution and one from which left organisations need to learn. It reflects the fact that the women's movement is strong where the left at the moment is weak, namely in making the connection between the struggle for socialism and subjective experience, everyday life and culture. Moreover, in asserting that socialism is inseperable from the making of socialism, that organisation is related to consciousness as well as efficiency, and that prefigurative forms are central to both culture and strategy, it presents a new total vision of socialism, a vision that is precisely not fragmented, and which the left badly needs to recover and maintain, if it is to win back and go beyond the ground lost in the recent swing to the right in British politics.

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Discussion:

The Working Class and the Broad Democratic Alliance

Sam Aaronovitch

The left in the labour movement has a number of very difficult questions to answer about the reasons for the Tory electoral victory at the same time as it works to build the widest movement against the Tory onslaught. The answer which I find most plausible runs along the following lines.

First: the actions and policies of the Labour Government created confusion and cynicism about state intervention, state services and taxes in a period of economic crisis. Second: the left in the labour movement were a long way from the actual mood and level of understanding of the majority of the people including the majority of organised workers (even the *existence* of an alternative economic strategy was known only to a small minority of the movement). Third: this created a political vacuum which was exploited by a vigorous ideological campaign by the Tories which seized on the worries of the people and attached them to reactionary ideas on law and order, the state and the individual, the power of the unions versus the democratically elected government etc.

The sharp Tory attack will certainly meet with growing resistance but if that is to lead to a forward "leap" in the power of the socialist and labour movement then that movement must analyse the conditions for lifting the consciousness of different sections of the people (including the labour movement itself; and when we talk of the labour movement we must be clear whether we are talking of its activists or its membership—they are far from identical). Such an analysis must draw consequences for the policy and strategy of the socialist left and especially for the Communist Party itself. If it does not do that, we shall be back on the old treadmill. Put it another way: how is the labour movement both to shift its own position towards the left and increase its leading role amongst all the forces for change?

The Central Force

In my view, Mick Costello's article (*Marxism Today*, June 1979) in spite of its nine pages, leaves us unable to explain what has happened and offers no strategic vision that would allow us to carry forward the *British Road to Socialism*. Insofar as I understand it, I see the article as a step backward from our programme.

Before I go any further I wish to make one major point which is not to be taken for granted and where I am in agreement with him (and with Dave Cook too). The organised labour movement (which includes the trades unions, the trades councils, the Labour Party, the Co-operative movement, the Communist Party as well as many other organisations) taken together, is the single most important and central force in British society on which rests the prospect for revolutionary change. It is damaging not to recognise this.

But that movement has to be transformed if it is to play the role we require it to. Our ability to change it is, I believe, obstructed by the complacent and blinkered view which he presents.

For reasons of space I cannot deal with all his points but I want to take up a number of obscurities in his article.

First, let us look at this concern with the "leading role of the working class." It would help to have a clear view of what that class is and how it is changing. We are given vague references to that class as "those who are exploited," the "exploited producers of wealth" etc. Possibly, one cannot be sure, Mick Costello defines workers as those who produce surplus value. However, the majority of the workforce are not producers of surplus value; and we have to consider the position of housewives, dependents, pensioners and the long term unemployed. Moreover, even within the manufacturing sector there are important changes in the labour force (growth of administrative and technical staff etc).

These changes in the labour force are also reflected in the trade union movement since well over three million workers are organised in white collar unions or in white collar sections of unions. The bulk are in central and local government services and in the privately owned distribution, commercial and financial sectors. Within a decade it is likely that the majority of members on the General Council of the TUC will be representatives of non-manual workers.

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Of course, there is, as I have argued elsewhere (*Marxism Today*, 1973) an "historically evolved core" of the British working class, but which groups play a role of political and industrial leadership within that class will change over time. But beyond noting that these "new" sections are becoming numerically more important, Mick Costello has virtually nothing to say about them.

The Labour Party

Second, in his treatment of the labour and trade union movement he not only fails to analyse the meaning of changes in the trade union movement itself but, astonishingly, he largely ignores and totally underestimates the Labour Party and the importance of trying to change it and how that should be approached. To "sidestep" the Labour Party in this way is to show how little he understands the meaning of "working class leadership" which, if it is to mean anything, must become *political* leadership. Since, later in his article, he says that the trade unions cannot be transformed "into the leadership of the fight for socialism" he leaves us nevertheless only with the trade unions and the Communist Party as the main agents. That represents a massive retreat from the *British Road to Socialism*.

It is impossible to discuss the leading role of the working class (and the broad democratic alliance) without considering the Labour Party and its relations to the trade unions as well as to the CP itself. These are matters on which the left in the Labour Party are currently making important contributions, badly needing discussion by us. We are concerned with the campaign for greater democracy within the LP and also, for that matter, with the need for greater democracy in the trade unions; not only in the "formal" sense (election of officers etc) but through the involvement of the members in a situation where trade union branch meetings are notoriously unrepresentative of the membership. These matters which are vital for transforming the Labour movement (as well as the relationship between the LP and the TUs) are not discussed in the article. Tony Benn and others have proposed that the LP must also root itself in the workplaces as well as in the localities. Should the Communist Party members in the trade unions and in the workplaces not be working together with LP members and activists to bring this about? Should we not, in a situation where the right wing has made advances in a number of unions, place greater stress on grass roots rank and file campaigning?

Consciousness

A third area of obscurity arises when discussing the way in which consciousness develops in the working class. We should not confuse the *effect* of an action (e.g. in blocking some piece of government policy) with the development of an *understanding* of the need to transform those policies and how that is to be done. An action can have far greater political significance than is understood by the actors. The article confuses these issues. I need hardly belabour the now familiar points that militancy and socialist consciousness are far from identical; and that sectionalism remains a serious problem for the trade union movement. There is also a strong impression conveyed in the article that the CP simply supports whatever it is that trade unions do. We know that conflicts can arise between groups of workers (as for instance the problem that arose between shipbuilding workers over the Polish shipbuilding order) which make it vital for the Party to show strategic, class judgement. We need a much clearer effort to sort out the different kinds and levels of consciousness among working people; the article by Stan Newens and the interviews with Dan Connor, Bob Wright, Billy Benson, Arthur Hodges and Mike Le Cornu, all offer more useful contributions.

Essentially, whatever the obscurities, Mick Costello's article continues the tradition of narrow economism which has weakened the work in the industrial and trade union field.

I come, fourthly, to the broad democratic alliance (the BDA for short). The article speaks of democratic movements as those which, today, "see their aims as exerting pressure (within capitalism) for advances which they do not see as challenging a ruling class." And the article suggests that it is the special contribution of the working class and the labour movement to lead these movements to understand the root of the problem is in the capitalist system.

There are surely a number of misconceptions here.

That socialist understanding is still the property of a very small minority even within the labour movement not to speak of the working class. Most working people engaged in daily struggles see these in exactly the same way, i.e. exerting pressure within the system and not challenging a ruling class. How then are they to give this socialist understanding to the broad alliance? Part of the trouble is Mick Costello's blanket use of the term "working class leadership" without defining it or what is involved.

He argues boldly that the BDA does not have partial reforms as its objective but that of ending "capitalism, lock, stock and barrel." In this view, the BDA is a single revolutionary movement. But surely in practice and in theory, the BDA as it comes into being, is the property of the forces that constitute it; its objectives will evolve with that alliance as will its component parts. The higher the level of political consciousness of the labour movement, the more widely and boldly it espouses the needs of the people in all their variety, the greater will be its

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influence and ability to shape the path taken.

But in any case the content of the struggle of the labour movement should itself be seen as part of the battle for democracy: democratic control over the economy, over conditions of labour, over the control of the environment, and so forth.

What distinguishes socialists is their view that the fullest development of such democratic control involves ending the capitalist mode of production. And what distinguishes the Communist Party is that it has strategic ideas which begin to tackle in a realistic way how we advance from where we now are in conditions of advanced capitalism. No other section of the movement has worked out a comparable strategy.

For that strategy to work, the main political and industrial organisations of the working class need to establish their leadership in British society. But that requires broad, flexible styles and programmes; the attempt to explore these was one of the valuable aspects of Dave Cook's article (*Marxism Today*, Dec. 1978) which Mick Costello criticises so heavily.

It is vital, for instance, to organise and assist in developing movements based on localities and communities as well as in industries which can bring together *all* the forces of a community. Without such a movement, which stimulates varied plans of action and policies, the ideas of an alternative economic and social strategy will put down no grass roots; and it was the fact that this did not happen on a sufficiently large scale which helped the Tory ideological offensive to make such headway.

Leadership by the labour movement means that it must be fully involved in community based action and programmes. In this way, the important and potentially powerful role of industrial complexes where they exist (such as in Dagenham, Birmingham, London Airport, Teesside etc.) can be deployed.

In line with the *British Road to Socialism*, we need to broaden our whole notion of what struggle (including class struggle) is about. However qualified his language, Mick Costello gives the impression that the economic struggle is the crucial one and his main illustrations of working class leadership come from the wages fight. In a period of growing recession (not only in Britain but in the capitalist world), of Tory attack and of great ideological confusion, the need for alternatives and struggles which reach out to the widest circles of people and which link (not separate) the labour movement together with other movements, becomes desperately important. A narrow and limited view of struggle can only isolate the activists in the labour movement and prevent that movement from mobilising the mass of the people. If this happens, then, in conditions of crisis, the way could be open to even *more* reactionary, demagogic responses from the right. At one point, Mick Costello does say that the political consciousness of the labour movement is developed by taking up the issues that concern all sections of the people but he does not *use* this idea in the way it was done by Dave Cook in his article.

The Work of the Communist Party

My fifth point concerns the limitations of his approach to the work of the Communist Party.

It is absolutely correct to argue, as he does, that the Party needs to rebuild and expand its base among the workers in extractive, manufacturing and transport industries for all the reasons he gives as well as for others. Part of the reason why we have lost ground is the narrow, non-political way in which much of our activity in the trade union movement and in industry has been conducted in the past. But again, in striving to build up workplace organisation, we must think carefully what we are about. Capital is proving very mobile; plants are shut down or rationalised; enterprises very different from traditional ones are established in new places. The shift to white collar and technically qualified employment is likely to continue; and the massive shift that has already taken place towards services is unlikely to be significantly reversed. In many areas the main employers are local authorities, commercial and financial establishments just as there are areas of large scale industrial complexes. This requires a wide ranging approach to varied sections free from any kind of patronising or elitist flavour.

Furthermore, revitalising the Party so as to end the severe fall in membership and influence, requires a constructive plan of action for the Party's residential branches which contain the bulk of our membership. For these branches, the *major* emphasis has to be on developing community politics, i.e. unifying the maximum forces in a community around the issues which concern it and its various sections (including sexual and racial as well as other forms of oppression) for democratic advance which embrace economic, industrial, social and political programmes and demands. The Tory attack certainly gives an impetus to this. The conference in Hackney on July 22 (What's Left for Hackney) illustrates the kind of co-operation of Labour, Communist, Trade Union and community forces which needs to become a common pattern of work and which is shown in other forms in cities like Sheffield where the industrial base of the labour movement is much more clearly established.

Community involvement of this kind will help the Party branches to act more effectively on issues of national political and industrial policy; it will raise the political consciousness of the branches themselves, enabling them to start from where the people are. It confronts them with the issues of jobs, impact of technology, quality and character of the services and of the environment, of the varied kinds of sexual

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and racial oppression and discrimination, as well as the struggles on wages and conditions.

The importance of industrial work for the Party is or should not be in doubt. It is the character of it which is in question. The drive to build workplace branches should not, anyway, be narrowed down to an aspect of what is called "industrial work", as now tends to happen. Our aim is to create branches which offer all round political leadership and, according to the nature of the localities, work closely with the residential branches. Our industrial work must contribute to this.

Finally, the movement must develop on a very broad front; it is inseparable, as Lenin insisted, from the fight for democracy. We have great need for a style of industrial work which grasps this firmly.

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